

State forest officer does 85km Comrades Marathon in Africa

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THANE: A forest officer from the state completed the Comrades Marathon 2024 held in South Africa this month. Vishal Godade (38) ran the 85.91 km distance in 11 hours 35 minutes. "I'm the first forest officer from India to complete this ultra marathon," said Godade, range forest officer from Shahpur in Thane district. This year's 'Up Run' -- from Durban to Pietermaritzburg -- was an elevated surface. "It was tough, but worth all that pain," said Godade who used to do his long-run practice sessions at Lonavala on weekends.

While the dry runs done on home turf were in sweltering heat, the cool climate abroad turned out to be an advantage. "The weather made it easy. On the day of the run, the temperature hovered around 12 degrees Celsius in the morning, soaring to 22 degrees when the sun was up."

Godade, who completed the Full Ironman in 2022, said the jamboree-like ambience on the streets of South Africa enthused runners. People who had lined up the streets were cheering loudly. Indian participants were attired in a common jersey. "So, our Indians who were there cheered a bit louder on seeing us... It made you feel special and gave you the much-needed mental energy to go on," he said.

The organisers had put up hydration points all along the route. If any participant felt tired and needed help, there were hubs where runners could halt and get a basic physio treatment, he said.

The criterion for participants was that they should have completed around 1,000 km of running in four months just before the ultra marathon. Godade said he had clocked around 450 km, but his overall running track record helped him make the cut.

His colleagues and superiors at the forest department encouraged him to the hilt, Godade said, adding: "My wife and other family members were my biggest support."