

# Bombay to Goa via the waves



**LET'S SAIL:** Dutchmen Guido Schultz and Kees Jongens have camped at Girgaum Chowpaty before setting sail for the Bombay-to-Goa leg of the Vasco Da Gama Cup Yacht Rally on April 23—Pradeep Kocharekar

SHIVANI NAIK

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IT isn't the 616 km-long bus journey with Mehmood's on-screen comical drollery for classic company. But this Bombay-to-Goa trip with the sun and the sea forming a picturesque backdrop promises just as many thrills for the fleet of Indian yachtsmen and women participating in the inaugural off-shore yacht race for the Vasco Da Gama Cup.

This rally for amateurs, which also forms the last leg of the International Yacht Rally that first set sail in October 2005 from Turkey and has three scores of Europeans on board, will see some of the most natty yachts (currently anchored off the Girgaum harbour) leave Mumbai shores on April 23. The boats after a stopover at Ganapatipule will hit the Bayna Beach at Vasco Da Gama, Goa in four day's time.

Primarily a tourism initiative to promote off-shore yachting on the Western coast, the rally also provides some serious competitive exposure in long-distance navigation for some of In-

dia's young sailors.

For 18-year-old Salil Sabir, Indian junior national champion in Laser Class, the event provides the perfect opportunity to test his wares in big-boat sailing and also to visually gorge on the big yachts. "My father and mother have done this route in the past, but it wasn't an international event then. The maximum I've been out on the sea is for six hours, and this will be a new experience," says the Goan.

Ditto for Asian girls champions in the 420 Class - Rohini Rau and Pallavi Naik who will leave the cramped confines of their double-hander dinghy, while crewing the more luxurious yachts. "It won't be physically demanding; besides these are 8-10 metre long boats, and we will be almost living on them," gushes Rau, particularly impressed by two double-hull catamarans that have made their way into Mumbai after leaving Omani shores from Salalah. Pallavi, meanwhile is excited by the Canadian power boat Tango, as the 19-year-old embarks on her first overnight cruise.

National coach Gautama Dutta, a 21-time national medallist, and the world-record holder for sailing at the highest altitude, had been planning for the mega-event for the last two years, and hopes that authorities wake up to the tourism potential for off-shore yachting which may eventually lead to mushrooming of more marinas along the coast. "That's one reason why international yachters never came to India before," he explains adding that a Bombay-to-Goa rally was one of the features on the national scene half a decade ago, before a pullout by the sponsors ended the yearly affair.

Adventure sailors from Netherlands have trooped down in large numbers, all with many tales to tell from their years of sailing around various ports of the world. "It's a totally different lifestyle and these sailors have many experiences to share. Though participation in the Olympics is my main goal, some day I want to sail around the world," says Rau. Come Sunday and Bombay-to-Goa is a mere trailer to some bigger ambitions.