

# The Statesman

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## Scaling the summit

AN epitome of courage and valour, Major HPS Ahluwalia has been a mountaineer par excellence, a decorated army officer and is now the founder-chairman of Asia's largest hospital for spinal cord injuries. In 1965, he conquered Mt Everest but before the triumph could soak in, a bullet injury to his spine left him a paraplegic. Such a debilitating injury would have wrecked anyone's life, but Major Ahluwalia's never-say-die spirit saw him go on to set up a state-of-the-art hospital.

The exceptional soldier has truly lived up to the army saying that "when the going gets tough, the tough get going". Impressed by his amazing spirit, Microsoft recently invited him to address their young profes-

sionals and inspire them with his philosophy of life. The man with the amazing spirit spoke to RITA JOSEPH on how he scaled the summit of the mind.

**When you look back today how does it feel and what has been your most rewarding experience?**

Building a hospital has been the most rewarding one because we desperately needed a facility like this in India.

**Why were you so keen on the hospital project?**

After the bullet injury I was moved from one hospital to another. After struggling for two-and-a-half years in various hospitals, I was finally sent to Stoke Mandeville Hospital, UK, for treatment.

I was determined to rebuild my life against all odds. It was a life changing experience for me. Over the years, I visited Stoke Mandeville Hospital many times for my check-ups. Every visit reinforced my conviction that India desperately needed a centre like this.

Sir Ludwig Guttmann, the chairman of Stoke Mandeville, inspired me while Dr Walsh, his successor and my physician, motivated and helped me design and establish my dream project with the help of the governments of India and Italy. Today Indian Spinal Injuries Centre is a landmark healthcare institute at par with the best in the world. We continuously strive to make a difference, restore hope and joy in the heart of every patient and enable them to conquer the summit of the mind.

# of the mind

Was it not difficult to convince people that you could achieve your dream with just steely determination and empty pockets?

Yes, it was difficult to convince people. But a strong will power along with perseverance made it possible.

Who or what has been your inspiration?

My life has been a long journey of extreme ups and downs... of hope and despair and of aspirations and achievements. Every experience has taught me a valuable lesson and helped me shape my philosophy of life. Mountains have been my inspiration from the very beginning having been born in Shimla, studied in Dehradun and Mussoorie and my first posting being in Kashmir. It was perhaps natural for me to take up

mountaineering and live every mountaineer's dream, of scaling Mount Everest.

Having climbed Mount Everest gave me great confidence. It led me to believe that there are no hurdles in life. The schooling with the army was also a great learning experience. But, the life-threatening injury was the most difficult ~ even as I lay unconscious ~ I had faint recollections of dreams of mountains, and skiing. My mother never cried in front of me at my paralysed state. In fact, she kept me motivated and encouraged by reminding me that I was alive for a reason ~ for a purpose in life. It is the power of the mind that matters. I feel Everest in my daily life ~ it is a big effort. The hospital project is closest to my heart.

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**Could you share some of the dreams of your early life and post the bullet injury to your spine?**

My dream was to enter the Merchant Navy and join one of the big sea lines but post-injury, I aim at helping patients who come for treatment to the hospital with the best possible rehabilitation facilities in the world.

**Despite being confined to a wheelchair you play table tennis and other games?**

Sports is a very essential therapy. Being a sports man myself, It helps me to take away all the tension and strains off my mind.

**Microsoft invited you to inspire their young professionals, how was the experience?**

I was invited to Microsoft to participate in their session for 'Big Bold Goals for 2011' as chief guest. I enjoyed the chance to address and interact with the young professionals of India's tomorrow. It was a great experience to inspire and share my experience and philosophy of life with the august audience.

**What is your message to the youth?**

As the builders of tomorrow's India, each one of you can help to take our nation forward and make it the knowledge superpower of the world. I believe that if we can serve the needs of all our fellow human beings, without any consideration of caste, creed, colour or country ... if we can share knowledge and resources across borders of nations ... we can build a global community of friendship, health and hope for all generations to come. Let us heal the world — together.