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Cyclists and celebrity rally to raise awareness about MS

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To commemorate World Multiple Sclerosis Day, a 20 km long bicycle rally was organized by Mumbai Chapter of Multiple Sclerosis Society of India in association with Bandra Cycle Club. Carrying flags and dressed in orange, the rally which started early morning from Lucky Bandra to Worli Sea Face and back witnessed hundreds of people cheering alongside members of civil society to voice their concern and support for MS patients. Celebrities included MS Good Will Ambassador Mr Milind Soman and MTV Roadies Judge Mr Raghu Ram who led the rally from the front. According to Ms Sheela Chitnis, chairperson, MSSI Mumbai Chapter, "The event is more than a ride-it's motivation, solidarity, personal accomplishment, and the knowledge that we can make a difference in the life of youth, imparting them with the promise of a better, healthier future."

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is an auto-immune disease in which the body attacks its own cells and tissues. Due to damage in the nerve layer i.e. myelin sheath, transmission of signals from the brain and spinal cord gets affected. The most common symptoms are weakness in the limbs, numbness, sudden loss of balance, blurred vision that may lead to paralysis. The disease mostly strikes youth at a time when are starting new careers, relationships or making plans for the future.

Dr Arun B Shah, consultant, neurologist, Breach Candy Hospital, Mumbai said, "There has been a steady increase in the number of neurological diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis in recent times. The numbers are rising apparently due to increased awareness or increased availability of imaging facilities such as MRI scans. This chronic neurological condition causes long-term disability if left untreated. Also, such patients suffer severe pain and go through mental as well as physical trauma. It becomes crucial to give support to such patients with high priority."

On the occasion, Mr Milind Soman, model and actor said, "It's really nice to see the sheer enthusiasm, love and energy of the people. It really makes me feel good. I encourage all Mumbaikars to support the cause so that people with MS are able to lead the best possible life and with dignity."

According to estimates, there are between 100,000-200,000 multiple sclerosis patients in India, even though that there are no exact statistics on MS. Women are twice more likely to fall prey to MS than men. Genetic and environmental factors are thought to contribute to MS, but a specific cause for the disease hasn't been yet identified nor a permanent cure although certain disease modifying medications such as interferon and monoclonal antibodies help reduce recurrent attacks and prevent disability.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of India (MSSI) is a charitable, non-profit voluntary organization founded in the year 1985. The organization proactively works towards encouraging MS patients to lead a more productive life through counseling, rehabilitation and support through its various state chapters.