

## Only Indian to carry the Olympic torch is excited, proud

The only Indian chosen to carry the Olympic torch is 'excited, happy, nervous' about the July 7 event and says she feels 'very proud' to represent India in China, a country where she lives and works.

Unfortunately for Meena Barot, her parents have returned to Gujarat due to poor health after being with her in April and May and will not be able to witness her run of 200 metres under the gaze of Chinese and global media.

The 36-year-old Indian company executive is one of only eight foreigners who will carry the Olympic torch - in Lanzhou city in Gansu province. There will also be two women from the US and Venezuela as well as five men from the Philippines, Germany, Japan, Colombia and Russia. They were picked from 262 expatriates from 47 countries after an online contest.

Barot, who moved to China in March 2005 and speaks Mandarin fluently, will have her torch lit by one of the other expatriates and light another's when her lap ends. And she is ecstatic that she can keep her torch too!

'It is a great feeling, a very proud moment for me, as I will be representing our country at such a big platform. Frankly, I have still to come to terms with the reality. I am excited, happy, nervous, all at the same time,' the executive told IANS over email from Shijiazhuang, about 250 km from Beijing.

'Coming from a simple middle class Gujarati family, I never thought I will ever be able to do something to make a difference to my family, friends, leave alone the country. The torch relay has given me the opportunity to achieve that.

'There are no words that can describe how proud I feel. It is really a very proud moment considering the fact that I shall be the only Indian who shall be running with the Olympic torch in the host country.'

The run by Barot and the other expatriates was earlier scheduled for June 25. It was postponed to July 5 and then by two more days.

How enthusiastic are the Chinese people about the August Olympic Games despite the earthquake that has killed thousands in the country?

Said Barot: 'Every single Chinese I have come across is absolutely excited about the Beijing Olympics. This is evident from the fact that many people have planned their wedding during the period, especially on the opening day, Aug 8.

'Many women got pregnant last year so that they can deliver a baby during the Olympic year, especially they want to have their baby on the first day of the Olympics. The first baby that will be born on the opening day will be termed the Olympic Baby.

'There are lots of celebrations going on all around China. In fact there was a big celebration in all the cities (including mine) April 30 when 100 days were left for the Olympics to start.'

Barot, who clearly loves China, said that despite this year's snowstorm, violence in Tibet and the earthquake, 'the Olympic spirit is the same. This is evident from the torch relay going through various cities in China'.

When Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited China in January this year, Barot got to meet him briefly. She had then told IANS: 'Although it was only a two-minute interaction, he appeared to be a very down-to- earth, kind and polite person. He spoke very nicely, wished me luck and blessed me.'

*M.R. Narayan Swamy (© IANS / India eNews)*