

## Hardik - India's first space tourist

'Bingo Bindass' is finally going to space. Hardik Gajjar, a science undergraduate from Ahmedabad, has won UTV's 'Bingo Bindass Go to Space Contest' to become the country's first space tourist.

UTV, which launched its entertainment channel called Brand Bindass last August, started the contest to find India's first space tourist. After a seven-city hunt and ground auditions, it zeroed in on Ahmedabad-based Hardik.

'Honestly speaking, I was attracted by the prizes of watches and iPods! I thought, if not the space ticket, I'll at least win an iPod,' said Hardik.

'When I entered the contest, I had a gut feeling that I would win. I also have my mother's blessings. My father left us five years ago. We don't even know where he is. My mother toiled hard and supported me pursuing not just my studies, but all other interests as well.

'Somewhere deep down in my heart, I wanted to show my father that I could make it without him. With this win, I'm happy that I've made my mother proud and given a fitting reply to my absentee father,' said Hardik, who wants to make it big in Bollywood.

'Ever since I was in 11th standard, I've dreamt of a career in Bollywood. I want to make it big in the media as an entertainer. I want to entertain the world, rob the world! I've been into dance, music, mimicry and anchoring.'

Hardik bagged a trophy in 2004 in a dance competition organised by Mallika Sarabhai's academy and the Divya Bhaskar newspaper.

'I've also won many inter-college and inter-university events in mimicry and acting.'

Ask him what he looks forward to in space, and Hardik says: 'I'm extremely excited about going to space and also training at NASA. I'm so proud of the fact I'll be one of the few Indians at NASA. It's something one can dream of.

'But now, for me it's real! I'd love to take pictures of the earth from space and show my friends. It'll be great to look at our earth from such an immense distance. As for apprehensions, none! And if at any point I do experience fear I'll transform it to courage. But I won't tell anybody about it!'

Space tourism is going to take off at the end of 2009 or the beginning of 2010 and Hardik is expected to travel then.

*Arpana* ( © IANS / India eNews)