

Sakal Times, Pune, April 26, 2012. Pp.2

# Veteran astronaut regrets politics in space exploration

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**Pune: Marsha Ivins**, a veteran astronaut who has logged 55 days in space, regrets political intervention in deciding space exploration programmes.

It is the political leadership of the countries which decide for votes whether space exploration programmes need to be carried out, Marsha regretted in a chat with reporters here on

Wednesday. Marsha is on a two-week visit to India under an outreach programme that has been sponsored by the United States government.

Marsha, who retired from National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) after a 37-year stint, says the US funding for space exploration is miniscule and people have started realising this. Earlier, people did not realise how 'little we spent' we spent, but the awareness is now dawning.

The diminutive astronaut recalled that she had developed a passion for exploring space as a ten-year-old in 1961 when United States

sent Allan Shepard to space. "As children, we were captivated by the idea," Marsha recalled while adding that prior to that event, the career of astronauts did not find much favour. Even the school system did not offer any encouragement to become an astronaut, she said.

However, caught by the fancy, Marsha did her aerospace engineering and after two unsuccessful attempts, was finally accepted as an astronaut on her third attempt in 1984. "Never take a 'no' for an answer," Marsha advises youngsters while relating her own persistence.

As an astronaut, she was member of five space mis-

sions. "My last mission in 2001 was the most challenging," Marsha says. She had been entrusted with the responsibility of the robotic arm operation during that mission.

"I trained for the mission for 18 months and had I failed in executing my responsibilities, it would have ruined the space station," she said. The mission was a success.

How does Earth look from space? "The Earth can be seen as a planet and not as a collection of cities. Physical boundaries are not discernible but man-made boundaries can be made out," she answered.

