



# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## Gagan all set for Olympic splash

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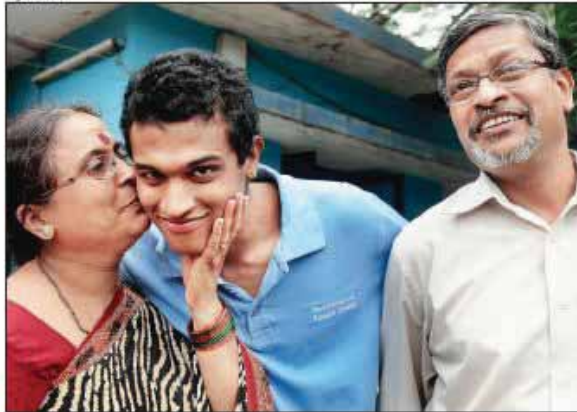
**Bangalore:** Nisha Millet and Hakimuddin Habibulla began the surge at Sydney 2000. Shikha Tandon followed it up at Athens 2004 and Rehan Poncha maintained the tempo at Beijing 2008. Four years down the line, Karnataka's leviathan swimming legacy will again ride on the crest of an Olympic wave through Gagan AP Ullalmath—India's lone representation at London.

### SWIMMING

Taking both brickbats and praises in equal stride, Gagan's focus now rests on only one thing—perform to his best at the mega quadrennial event.

"The last few weeks have been crucial for me and I have been training even harder. Realistically, winning a medal will be nothing less than a miracle. My aim is to achieve my personal best at London and do my country proud," said Gagan, India's first long-distance swimmer

Syed Asif



**GOOD LUCK KISS:** Olympic-bound swimmer Gagan Ullalmath with parents Sandhya and A. Puttaveeraswamy at a send-off ceremony in Bangalore on Saturday

to feature at the Olympics. Statemates Aaron D'Souza and Saurabh Sangvekar, who both met the 'B' standard or the Olympic Selection Time (OST) but failed to make the final cut, have wished him well, said Gagan. "Both of them are my training partners and I'm really thankful for their help. Rehan, Nisha and Shikha have

kept inspiring me to reach where I am now and it wouldn't have been possible without my coach, support staff and parents," the swimmer said at felicitation function at the Basavanagudi Aquatic Centre.

The final year BBM student, at Sri Bhagawan Mahaveer Jain College, who was awarded Rs 5 lakh by Chief

Minister Jagadish Shettar on Friday, also received a cheque for Rs 1 lakh from his College for his achievement. "The Chairman R. Chenraj Jain has also promised to waive off my post-graduation fees," Gagan gushed.

National Coach Pradeep Kumar, who will accompany Gagan to London, felt it would have been even more momentous if more swimmers would have qualified. "This is a great exposure for Gagan and FINA and the Swimming Federation of India have recognized his talent. I have seen him train dedicatedly early mornings braving the cold (the pool has no heating facility) and he really deserves it," he rued.

So with the opportunity to rub shoulders with some of the world's best, who was Gagan really looking forward to meet? "Michael Phelps and Ryan Lochte. They are my idols," he signed off.

Gagan and Pradeep leave for London on Monday morning.