THE NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

Para Swimmer Eyes Golden Quadrilateral

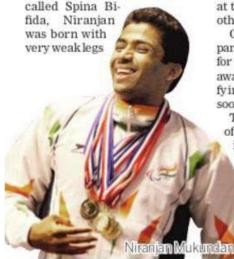## Niranjan Mukundan (20) looks for a team for the road trip

● **S S Shreekumar**

Given a choice between swimming and horse riding for rehabilitation at the age of seven, Niranjan Mukundan, now a B Com student at Jain University, chose swimming. Reason: He was afraid of horses, nay animals.

Diagnosed with a condition called Spina Bifida, Niranjan was born with very weak legs and has undergone 16 surgeries to keep his body intact through the rigours of swimming.

Today, at 20, Niranjan is a para swimming superstar in the making and has set many a pool ablaze with his performances. He won 10 medals in the 10 events at IWAS World Junior Games 2015 and was crowned Junior World Champion. The bronze medal he won at the Para Asian Games is another feather in his cap.

One of his biggest goals is to participate in the Paralympics for India. "I am milliseconds away from achieving the qualifying mark. I hope I make it soon," Niranjan says.

The young athlete has plans of going abroad to train and improve his chances. "I am in talks with a few coaches. If things fall into place, I will be off for some international training," he says.

The Government of India recognised Niranjan for his superlative achievements in the pool, as the Sports Ministry gave him the Best Sportsperson of the Year award recently in New Delhi. Coincidentally, Jain University, his alma mater, also bestowed on him the same honour. "In my batch alone, there are so many stars, so it came as a big surprise to me that I was chosen," he says.

Niranjan considers cricketer Rahul Dravid as his role model. "I was very fortunate to have him as my mentor at GoSports Foundation. Apart from him, I also look up to Michael Phelps," says Niranjan.

He is planning an audacious trip in his car to complete the Golden Quadrilateral, the highway connecting Chennai, Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai. "I love to drive and I love exploring new places. I am planning to do the Golden Quadrilateral. I am also looking for a team that could help me achieve this expedition," Niranjan says.

Niranjan Mukundan