

## **Billionaires pave way for development of space tourism**

A Monitor Report

Date: 01 August, 2021



New York : July has been a historic month for space tourism with headlines one after another on billionaires flying to space. On July 11, British entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson's Unity rocket-plane carried him and five fellow passengers about 85 kilometers above earth. And on July 20, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' New Shepard capsule reached an altitude of 106 kilometers while carrying Bezos, and three other passengers. All of them experienced several minutes of weightlessness while enjoying breathtaking views of earth from space.

Both flights turned heads massively and now the world is looking at a renewed anticipation of a lucrative commercial space tourism industry that could eventually witness thousands of rich passengers fly into space for leisure.

2021 marks 60 years of Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin becoming the first to travel to space. Since Tito's historic 2001 flight, seven other private citizens travelled to space via the space tourism agency Space Adventures, with travellers transported on Russian Soyuz spacecraft to the ISS.

Space Adventures, in partnership with the Russian space agency, are currently working on a 2023 Soyuz mission to the ISS which includes the opportunity for a space tourist to conduct a spacewalk. Also, Space Adventures is planning a trip for late 2021 via SpaceX's Crew Dragon spacecraft. They have the option to sell seats

aboard their spacecraft to anyone who can afford them.

US company SpaceX, founded by Elon Musk is perhaps the biggest player in the orbital space tourism arena.

In May 2020, SpaceX's Crew Dragon became the first commercial spaceship to send NASA astronauts to space and the company has plans to use the craft for a civilian-only journey later in 2021, with seats on offer for roughly USD 50 million each.

Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic has been working on suborbital space tourism projects for some time as well, selling tickets at USD 250,000 a person for the past several years. Branson was on board the company's milestone test flight on July 11, alongside two pilots and four other Virgin Galactic employees.

Virgin Galactic hopes these suborbital space flights will be available for paying members of the public by 2022.

Blue Origin is also eyeing suborbital space tourism and launched founder Jeff Bezos to the edge of space on July 20.

Jeffrey A Hoffman, former NASA astronaut, currently at MIT's Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics, said he's "very enthusiastic" about space tourism as a concept. He is hopeful that the historically astronomical cost of space tourism will come down as demand increases, and the projects in development become a working reality.