

Sunita Williams' 3rd Space Flight Aborted

Why In News

- The long-awaited **first crewed test flight of Boeing's new Starliner space capsule** was called off on Tuesday over a technical issue. The postponement, attributed to an **issue with a valve in the rocket's second stage**, was announced during a live NASA webcast.



- The Boeing Starliner was set to lift off from the **Kennedy Space Center** in Florida's Cape Canaveral at 8.04 am India time.
- "NASA, Boeing, and United Launch Alliance scrubbed the launch opportunity on Monday, May 6 for the agency's Boeing Crew Flight Test to the International Space Station due to a **faulty oxygen relief valve** observation on the United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket Centaur second stage," the space agency said in a statement.
- The **two-member crew - NASA astronauts Barry Wilmore, 61, and Sunita Williams, 58** - were strapped into their seats aboard the spacecraft about an hour before launch activities were suspended.

Sunita Williams

- This would have been the third space travel for the **Indian-origin astronaut**, who has already **spent 322 days** in space and held a record for the maximum hours of spacewalk by a woman, before being overtaken by Peggy Whitson.
- This time, she would have made history as the **first woman to fly** on a maiden crewed mission of a new space shuttle.
- Ms Williams went on her first space voyage on December 9, 2006, which lasted till June 22, 2007. While onboard, she established a world record for women by going on four spacewalks that added up to 29 hours and 17 minutes.



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What Is Boeing's Starliner

- **Starliner is a partially reusable crew capsule**, officially known as CST-100 (crew space transportation). The capsule, which is 5 m tall and 4.6 m wide, consists of two modules.



- One is the crew module, which can **accommodate seven astronauts** — although, for trips to the ISS, it will be modified for four astronauts and cargo. The crew module can be reused up to 10 times, with a six-month turnaround.
- The other is the service module — the powerhouse of the spacecraft — which supplies electricity, propulsion, thermal control, air, and water in space. This module is expandable.

What Is The Mission

- The **main objective of the mission** is to see how Starliner performs in space with a crew onboard. It is supposed to dock with the ISS — a day after the launch — for around 10 days before it returns to the Earth.



- During the return journey, NASA and Boeing will be keeping an eye on the **spacecraft's heat shield and parachutes**. They will slow the descent before airbags open to soften the moment of impact with the ground — unlike other crew capsules, Starliner will land on the ground and not in the sea.