



Suborbital Flight

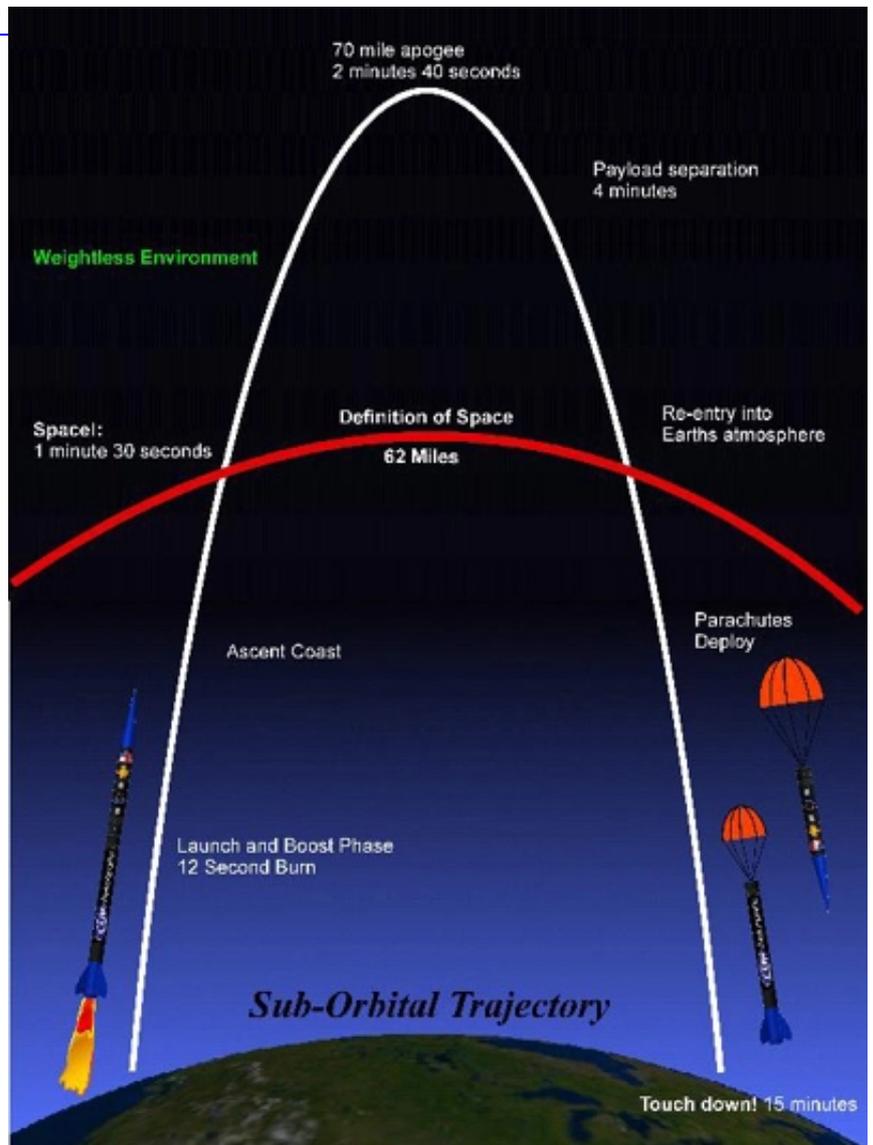
Why in News

Recently, a six person crew on **Virgin Galactic's VSS Unity spaceship** undertook a brief trip to the "edge of space" which is known as **Suborbital Flight**.

- **Sirisha Bandla, an astronaut born in India**, was a part of the crew. She was the **third woman of Indian origin** to go to space after **Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams**.
- **Virgin Galactic** is a British-American **spaceflight company**, operating in the United States.

Key Points

- **Suborbital Flight/Trajectory:** [//](#)



- When an **object travels at a horizontal speed of about 28,000 km/hr or more**, it **goes into orbit** once it is above the atmosphere.
 - The **satellites need to reach that threshold speed (orbital velocity)** in order to orbit Earth.
- Such a satellite would be **accelerating towards the Earth due to gravity**, but its **horizontal movement is fast enough to offset the downward motion** so that it moves along a circular path.
- Any object travelling **slower than 28,000 km/hr must eventually return to Earth**.
- Any object that launches to space but **does reach sufficient horizontal velocity to stay in space falls back to Earth**. Hence they **fly in a suborbital trajectory**.
 - It means that while these **vehicles will cross the ill-defined boundary of space**, they will **not be going fast enough to stay in space** once they get there.

▪ **Significance of Suborbital Flights:**

◦ **Increased Access:**

- It would provide **increased flight access for design innovation** and experimental manipulation due to high projected flight rates.

◦ **Research:**

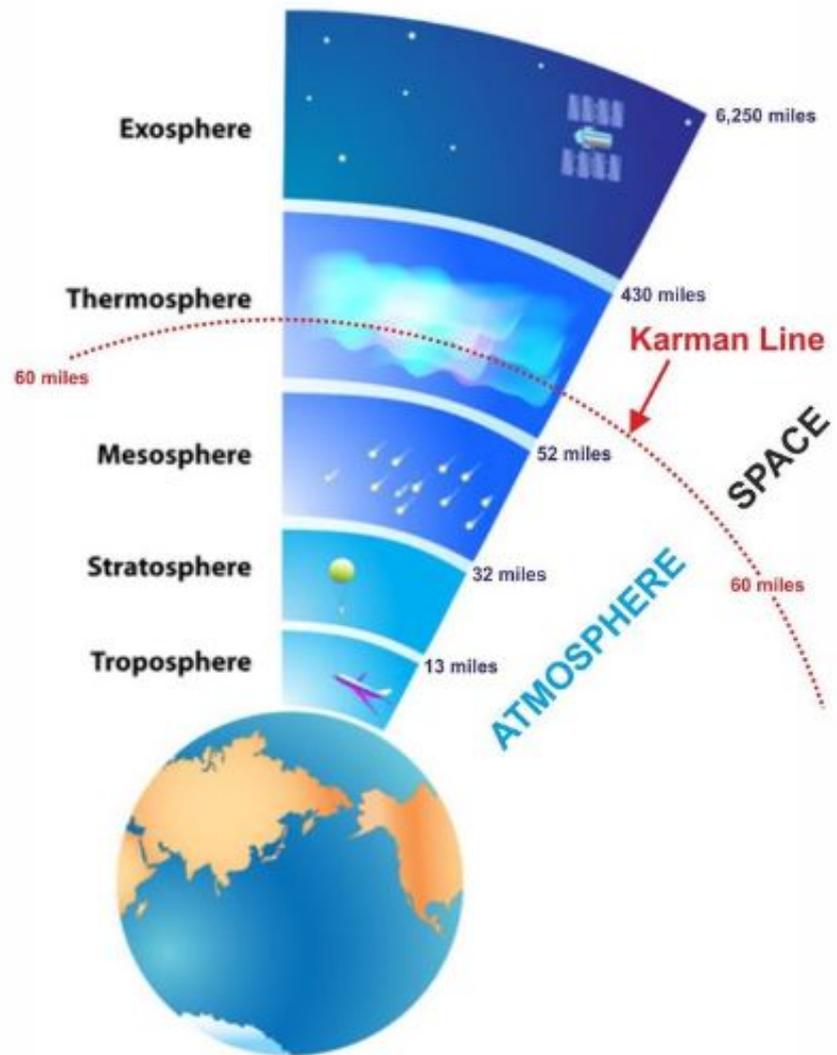
- Suborbital flights will be helpful **for microgravity research**. Microgravity is the **condition in which people or objects appear to be weightless**.
- Suborbital flights **could also be an alternative to parabolic flights** in aeroplanes that space agencies currently use to simulate **zero gravity**.

- **Zero Gravity** or Zero-G can simply be defined as the **state or condition of weightlessness**.

◦ **Cost Effective:**

- They would be **far less expensive** than carrying experiments and people to the [International Space Station](#).

▪ **Edge of Space/Karman Line:**



- The most widely accepted boundary of space is known as the [Karman line](#). The **Fédération Aéronautique Internationale (FAI)** defines Karman Line as the altitude of 100 kilometres above Earth's mean sea level.
 - FAI is the world governing body for air sports, and also stewards definitions regarding human spaceflight.
- The Kármán line has been compared to international waters, as there are no national boundaries and human laws in force beyond the line.
- It is named after **Theodore von Karman (1881-1963)**, a Hungarian American engineer and physicist, who was active primarily in aeronautics and astronautics.
 - He was the **first person to calculate the altitude at which the atmosphere becomes too thin to support aeronautical flight** and arrived at 83.6 km himself.
- However, other organizations do not use this definition. **There is no international law defining the edge of space**, and therefore the limit of national airspace.

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