

# Hindustan Times

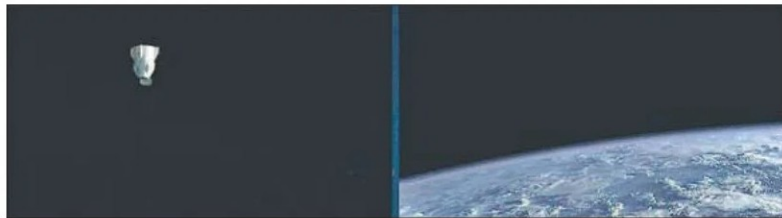
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## Shukla's journey home begins



The Dragon spacecraft, with Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla and three other astronauts on board, undocks from the International Space Station (ISS) on Monday. The Axiom-4 crew is set to reach Earth on Tuesday afternoon after a roughly 22-hour journey. [Behind the scenes](#) NASA



Axiom-4 undocks from the International Space Station's Harmony module on Monday.

YOUTUBE-AXIOM SPACE

## Shukla's journey home begins

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**MUMBAI:** Monday marked the end of a historic 20-day space mission for Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla who, along with three Axiom-4 (Ax-4) crew members, took off for a 22.5-hour return journey to Earth.

At 4.45pm IST, the Dragon Grace spacecraft with commander Peggy Whitson, mission pilot Shukla and mission specialists Sławosz Uznanski-Wisniewski and Tibor Kapu autonomously undocked from space-facing port on the Harmony module of the International Space Station (ISS) where the crew spent 18 days.

The spacecraft then performed a series of departure burns to move away from the orbiting laboratory, Grace, after conducting several orbit-lowering manoeuvre and jettisoning the trunk, will re-enter the Earth's atmosphere for a splashdown off the coast of California at 3.01pm IST on Tuesday.

The process of return of the fourth private astronaut's mission started at 2pm IST with the crew entering the SpaceX's Grace capsule before hatch clo-



Shubhanshu Shukla and other crew members of the Axiom-4 mission aboard the Dragon Grace spacecraft on Monday during their journey back to Earth. NASA

sure. At 2.10pm, Shukla floated in, preceded by Whitson and followed by Uznanski-Wisniewski and Kapu.

At 2.37pm, the hatches between the Dragon capsule and APAS hatch on ISS were sealed. What followed was an almost two-hour wait inside Grace as depressurisation of the vestibule was carried out to bring it down to vacuum followed by checks to rule out any

leaks.

Before undocking, the spacecraft's umbilical arms retracted from ISS, and 12 hard capture hooks got unscrewed in two phases lasting 4.5 minutes. Once undocked, the spacecraft executed a series of departure burns before re-entering the Earth's atmosphere.

Mission teams from Axiom, SpaceX and NASA said weather conditions for Tuesday's splash-

down "looked good with no rain or lightning in the recovery zone and wind speed of 10 miles per hour as required".

Union minister Jitendra Singh expressed delight on the successful undocking. "Welcome back Shubhanshu! The entire nation eagerly awaits your arrival back home, as you begin your return journey, after successful undocking of Axiom-4," he said in a post on X.

The crew will undergo medical examination in SpaceX's recovery vessels at potential splashdown sites before being flown by helicopter to Houston, Texas. The crew will then undergo about a week's rehabilitation programme under the supervision of flight surgeons to enable them to adjust back to Earth's gravity.

In a pre-recorded conversation, released by Axiom Space on Monday, Whitson said, "From me having experienced it, I know first person it sucks. Gravity really does. And so, I am not looking forward to that part... I am a downhill person where I don't really adjust well to gravity as I adjust to micro-gravity."

Shukla, on the other hand, said he has no expectations of going back in gravity being a first timer. "I did have some symptoms coming up. So I am hoping that I will not (have them) going down."

Shukla's father, Shambu Dayal Shukla, expressed his joy over the undocking and told ANI, "We are very happy that the undocking took place safely. We expect that the landing will also take place smoothly... We are all very proud of our son..."