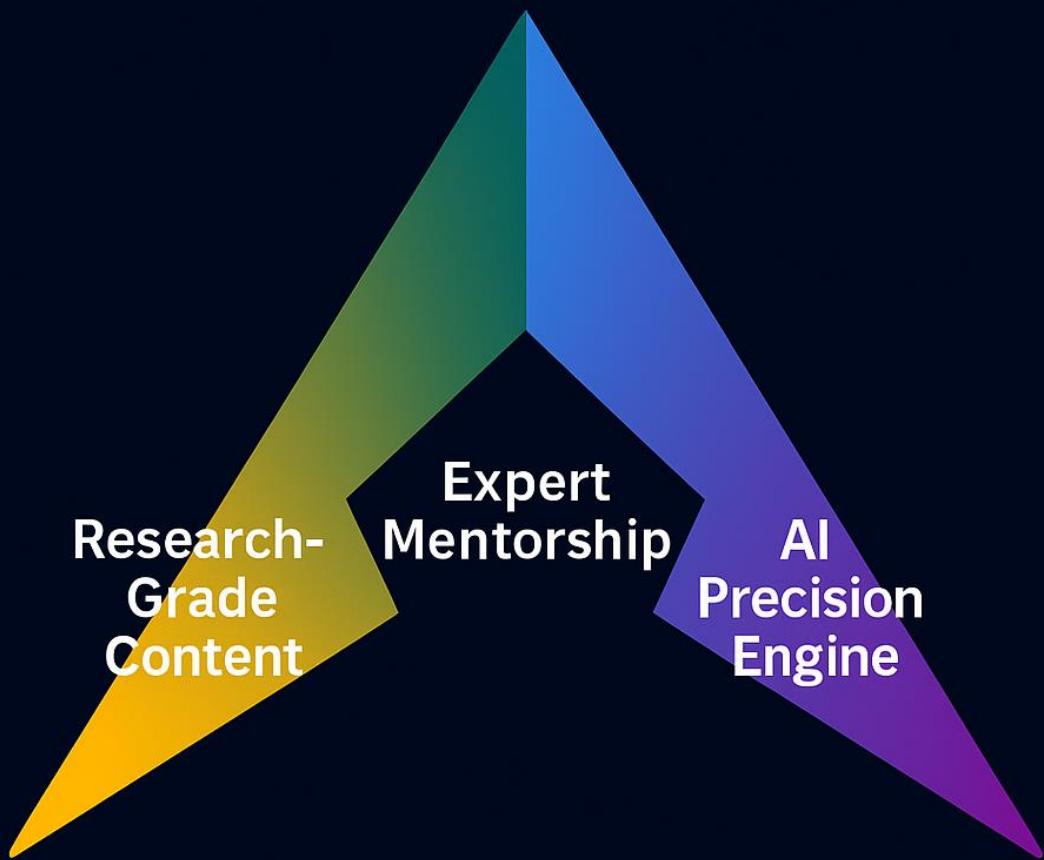


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GS Paper II: Current Affairs

1. Women's Night Shifts to Women's Safety Net Rules Under New Labour Codes

a. Introduction

India's labour law framework has long been characterised by fragmentation, multiplicity of statutes, and uneven enforcement. Over decades, numerous central labour laws were enacted to address specific issues—wages, industrial disputes, safety or social security—often functioning in isolation. This resulted in high compliance costs for employers, regulatory ambiguity, and inadequate protection for workers, particularly in an economy dominated by informality, contractualisation and emerging forms of work.

To overcome these structural limitations, Parliament enacted four comprehensive Labour Codes, consolidating 29 central labour laws into a unified framework. The reform seeks to create a simpler, uniform and inclusive labour regime that balances economic efficiency, worker welfare and social justice.

b. The Four Labour Codes: Structural Context

India's labour law consolidation rests on four Codes, each addressing a distinct dimension of labour regulation.

i. Code on Wages

This Code ensures minimum wages, timely payment of wages, and equal remuneration for equal work, aiming to reduce wage-related inequalities and simplify wage determination across sectors.

ii. Industrial Relations Code

It governs trade unions, industrial dispute resolution, strikes, layoffs, and retrenchment, attempting to balance workers' rights with industrial stability and ease of doing business.

iii. Code on Social Security

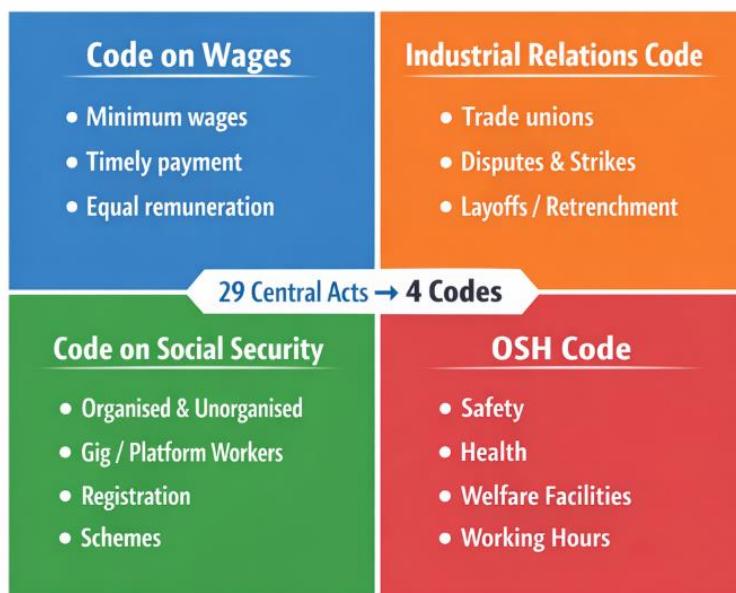
This Code significantly expands the scope of welfare by covering organised workers, unorganised workers, gig workers and platform workers, reflecting the changing nature of employment.

iv. Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (OSH Code)

The OSH Code consolidates laws relating to workplace safety, health standards, welfare facilities, and working hours, making it central to issues of humane working conditions.

c. Regulation of Working Hours

India's Labour Codes: 4 Pillars (29 laws → 4 Codes)



i. Weekly Working Hours

The Labour Codes prescribe a maximum working limit of 48 hours per week, continuing India's long-standing commitment to humane working conditions. This ceiling aligns with International Labour Organization (ILO) standards and draws normative support from the Directive Principles of State Policy, which emphasise just and humane conditions of work.

By retaining a clear weekly cap, the Codes seek to prevent excessive exploitation while allowing enterprises sufficient operational flexibility.

ii. Daily Working Hours and Spread-Over

While the weekly limit is statutorily fixed, daily working hours, rest intervals and spread-over are left to be detailed through subordinate legislation.

The term spread-over refers to the total duration from the beginning to the end of a working day, including rest breaks. Draft rules under the OSH Code had proposed a maximum spread-over of 12 hours, aiming to balance industrial flexibility with worker protection.

This approach reflects a conscious shift away from rigid uniformity towards sector-sensitive regulation, recognising the diversity of India's labour market.

d. Women's Night Shifts

i. Nature of the Provision

One of the most debated reforms under the Labour Codes is the permission granted to women to work during night shifts, generally defined as work between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. This marks a departure from earlier blanket restrictions that effectively excluded women from certain sectors and roles.

Importantly, the provision does not mandate night work for women. Employment during night hours is voluntary and subject to compliance with prescribed safeguards.

ii. Rationale and Significance

The reform reflects a shift from a protectionist mindset to a rights-based and equality-oriented approach. By enabling women to work night shifts, the law expands employment opportunities in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, IT and services, which increasingly operate round-the-clock.

This aligns with constitutional principles of equality before law and non-discrimination, while responding to the demands of a modern, globalised economy.

iii. Safeguards for Women Workers

To balance opportunity with safety, employers are required to ensure:

- Safe transportation facilities
- Adequate lighting and workplace security
- Surveillance systems
- Effective grievance redressal mechanisms

These safeguards underline the principle that gender equality in employment must be accompanied by safety, dignity and institutional accountability.

e. Contract Employment and Gratuity

A notable reform under the Labour Codes relates to gratuity eligibility for contract workers. Under the new framework, contract workers become eligible for gratuity after completing one year of service.

Earlier, gratuity was typically linked to longer periods of continuous service, which excluded a large segment of workers engaged on short-term or renewable contracts. By reducing the eligibility threshold, the Codes acknowledge the structural shift towards contractualisation in India's labour market.

This reform strengthens the principle of fair compensation and reduces economic insecurity among temporary workers.

f. Registration of Informal Workers

i. Understanding Informal Workers

Informal workers are those operating outside formal employment arrangements and lacking access to institutional social security. This category includes:

- Daily wage labourers
- Migrant workers
- Domestic workers
- Self-employed individuals
- Gig and platform workers

Given that nearly 90% of India's workforce is informal, their exclusion from welfare mechanisms has been a major policy challenge.

ii. Provision under the Code on Social Security

The Code on Social Security mandates the registration of all informal workers aged 16 years and above. Registration serves as the foundational step for identifying beneficiaries and extending social security coverage.

iii. Importance of Registration

Registration enables:

- Targeted delivery of welfare schemes
- Portability of benefits for migrant workers
- Improved labour market data and policy planning
- Gradual formalisation of the economy

This provision represents a critical shift from fragmented welfare delivery to a data-driven and inclusive social security framework.

g. Transition from the Old Regime to the New Codes

Until the new Codes are fully operationalised through notified rules, existing labour laws and rules continue to remain in force. This transitional arrangement ensures legal continuity, prevents regulatory vacuum, and avoids disruption to workers' rights and employer obligations.

Such continuity reflects a pragmatic and phased approach to reform rather than abrupt legislative overhaul.

h. Implementation Challenges

Despite their reformist intent, the Labour Codes face several practical challenges:

- Ensuring women's safety during night shifts requires effective enforcement, not just formal compliance
- Labour being a Concurrent Subject necessitates strong Union–State coordination, risking uneven implementation
- MSMEs often face limited compliance capacity
- Informal workers may struggle with awareness, digital access and registration hurdles

These challenges underline that legislative reform must be matched by administrative capacity, institutional coordination and sustained outreach.

Conclusion

The Labour Codes represent a fundamental shift in India's labour governance, moving from fragmented regulation to a unified, rights-oriented framework. Provisions relating to working hours, women's night shifts, and informal worker registration reflect an effort to reconcile economic flexibility with social protection.

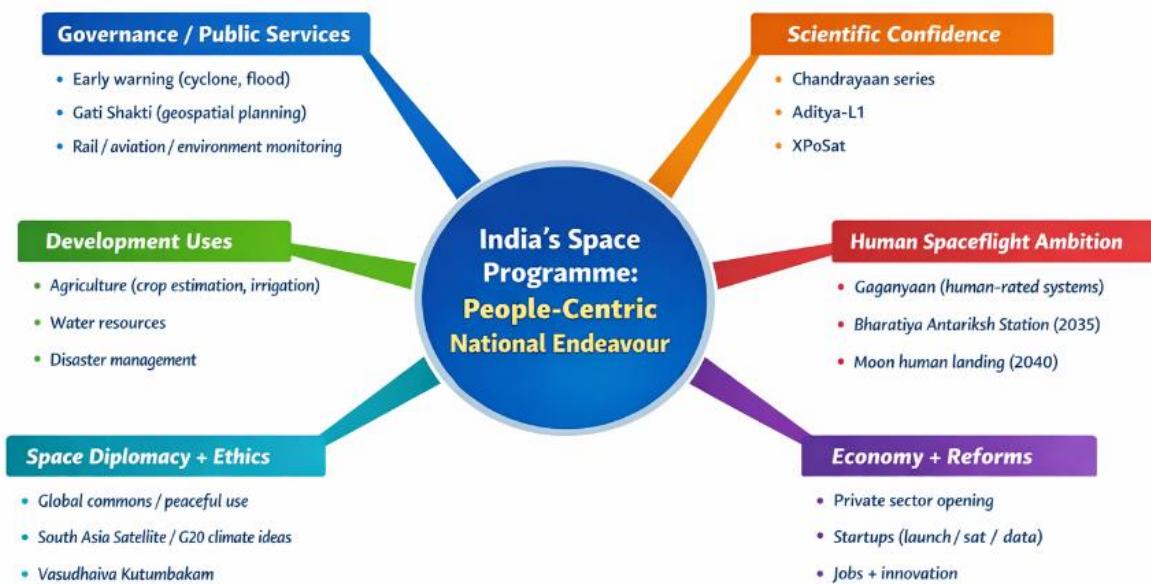
GS Paper III: Science and Technology

2. India's Space Programme: A People-Centric National Endeavour

a. Introduction

India's space programme has evolved far beyond its early identity as a narrowly scientific or strategic initiative. Over time, it has emerged as a people-oriented national endeavour, deeply embedded in governance, development and collective aspiration. Space technology today supports weather forecasting, disaster management, agriculture, communication and navigation, quietly shaping everyday life across the country. Simultaneously, landmark missions have nurtured national confidence and inspired a generation of young Indians.

In the context of *Viksit Bharat @2047*, India's space journey represents a distinctive model—one that combines technological ambition with inclusiveness, affordability and ethical responsibility. Space is no longer distant science; it has become an instrument of public good and a symbol of India's future-facing vision.



b. Evolution of India's Space Programme

India's space journey can be understood through three broad phases, each progressively deepening its connection with society.

i. Foundational Phase: Development-Oriented Beginnings

From its inception in the 1960s, India's space programme was shaped by Dr. Vikram Sarabhai's vision that space technology must directly serve the needs of a developing country. Instead of prestige-driven exploration, early efforts prioritised practical applications.

- INSAT satellites strengthened communication, broadcasting and meteorology
- Indian Remote Sensing satellites supported agriculture, water resources and disaster preparedness
- Weather forecasting and cyclone warning systems significantly reduced loss of life in coastal regions

The emphasis on self-reliance, affordability and civilian use firmly established space as a tool for development rather than power projection.

ii. Strategic and Scientific Consolidation

From the early 2000s, India's space programme entered a phase of scientific consolidation and international recognition.

- **Chandrayaan-1 (2008)** made a landmark contribution by confirming the presence of water molecules on the Moon
- **Mars Orbiter Mission (Mangalyaan, 2014)** successfully reached Mars orbit on the first attempt

Mangalyaan, achieved at a fraction of global mission costs, demonstrated India's capacity for frugal innovation. During this phase, India emerged as a credible space-faring nation, capable of advanced exploration without compromising cost efficiency.

iii. Aspirational and People-Centric Phase

The current phase reflects a shift from capability demonstration to collective national aspiration.

- **Chandrayaan-3 (2023)** achieved a historic soft landing near the Moon's south pole
- **Aditya-L1** expanded India's solar research capabilities
- **XPoSat** advanced studies on black holes and extreme astrophysical phenomena
- **SpaDeX** successfully demonstrated in-orbit docking, a critical future capability

Space achievements are now perceived not as distant institutional successes, but as shared national milestones that inspire youth and reinforce confidence in India's technological future.

c. Human Spaceflight and National Ambition

A defining feature of India's contemporary space vision is its commitment to human spaceflight.

The Gaganyaan programme, India's first indigenous human space mission, represents a major technological and organisational leap.

- Approved outlay exceeding ₹20,000 crore
- Development of human-rated launch vehicles and life-support systems
- Indian Air Force test pilots undergoing advanced astronaut training
- Progressive uncrewed and crewed mission roadmap

Beyond Gaganyaan, India has articulated a long-term vision:

- Bharatiya Antariksh Station by 2035
- Indian human landing on the Moon by 2040

These goals reflect not merely ambition, but a belief that advanced science and exploration are integral to national self-confidence.

d. Space Technology as an Instrument of Governance

Space technology today functions as invisible public infrastructure, strengthening governance and service delivery.

- Satellite-based early warning systems enhance disaster preparedness
- Agricultural applications support crop estimation, irrigation planning and crop insurance settlement
- Fishermen receive satellite-enabled navigation and safety advisories
- PM Gati Shakti relies on geospatial platforms for integrated infrastructure planning
- Environmental monitoring, railway safety and aviation surveillance benefit from space-based systems

This integration marks a shift from elite science to democratised technological governance, where benefits reach citizens directly.

e. Youth Engagement and Scientific Temper

India's space programme places strong emphasis on nurturing scientific capacity and curiosity.

- Hosting the International Olympiad on Astronomy and Astrophysics
- Organising ISRO Robotics Challenges and national space hackathons
- Outreach programmes connecting students with real-world space applications

These initiatives promote Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education and advance the constitutional duty to develop a scientific temper under Article 51A of the Indian Constitution. Space exploration is increasingly viewed by youth as a viable career path and national mission, not a distant spectacle.

f. Space Sector Reforms and Economic Potential

A major reform has been the opening of the space sector to private participation.

- Space activities are no longer confined to ISRO
- Hundreds of startups now operate in launch vehicles, satellites and space data services
- Public investment is complemented by user-funded missions

India's space economy, currently valued at around \$8 billion, is projected to grow several-fold, positioning space as a sunrise sector capable of generating high-skilled employment, innovation and global competitiveness.

g. Global Cooperation and Space Diplomacy

India approaches outer space as a shared global commons, guided by Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

- NISAR (USA), TRISHNA (France) and LUPEX (Japan) exemplify scientific collaboration
- South Asia Satellite and the proposed G20 Climate Satellite extend benefits to developing partners
- Launch of hundreds of foreign satellites has enhanced India's global credibility

These efforts position India as a responsible, cooperative and trusted space actor.

h. Preparing for the Future

Looking ahead, India is investing in advanced technologies:

- Autonomous space operations and robotics

- In-space manufacturing and electric propulsion
- Quantum communication and long-duration mission capabilities

These technologies are essential for space stations, lunar exploration and future strategic needs, ensuring long-term relevance of India's space programme.

i. Ethical and Civilisational Dimensions

India's space journey reflects deeper ethical values:

- Civilian focus promotes equity for farmers, fishermen and disaster-prone communities
- Commitment to peaceful use reinforces global responsibility
- Sustained investment in science represents intergenerational justice

Space achievements have become emotionally resonant events, fostering national unity and shared aspiration.

Conclusion

India's space programme today stands as a compelling example of science in service of society. It integrates technology with governance, economic growth, education, diplomacy and ethical responsibility. In the era of Amrit Kaal, India is not merely participating in the global space order—it is shaping it with confidence, restraint and inclusiveness. With people at its centre and the future firmly in view, India's journey into space mirrors its broader national quest for development, dignity and global responsibility.

Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

The complete Monthly Current Affairs Module will be released soon, optimized to a compact 100–150 pages — comprehensive yet concise, exam-ready, and revision-efficient.

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