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Third National Space Day Marked at Ahmedabad as ISRO Sets Out Its Launch Backlog

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GS3

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[in linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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Third National Space Day Marked at Ahmedabad as ISRO Sets Out Its Launch Backlog

24 August 2026 · 5 min read ·

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

India observed its **third National Space Day** on **August 23, 2026**, with the national event hosted by ISRO's **Space Applications Centre (SAC)** at **Ahmedabad**. The day marks the **Chandrayaan-3** soft landing near the lunar south pole, achieved in 2023, and this year's theme was **"Towards Viksit Bharat: Innovating, Collaborating and Aspiring to Global Space Leadership."**

WHY THE DATE IS AUGUST 23

National Space Day commemorates the **Vikram lander's touchdown near the lunar south polar region**, which made India the **first country to land in that region** and the fourth to soft-land on the Moon at all. The landing site was designated **Shiv Shakti Point**.

The distinction is worth stating precisely, because it is regularly muddled. India was not the first to soft-land on the Moon. It was the first to soft-land **near the south pole**, a region that matters because permanently shadowed craters there are suspected to hold water ice.

WHO WAS THERE

ROLE	PERSON
Chief Guest	Gajendra Singh Shekhawat , Union Minister for Culture and Tourism
Guest of Honour	Arjunbhai Devabhai Modhwadia , Gujarat Minister
Presiding	Dr V. Narayanan , Secretary, Department of Space and Chairman, ISRO
IN-SPACe	Dr Pawan Kumar Goenka , Chairman
Host centre	Dr Ch V. N. Rao , Director, Space Applications Centre

The **Space Applications Centre** at Ahmedabad is ISRO's payload and applications centre, which is why the national event sat there rather than at a launch or tracking facility.

WHAT THE ISRO CHAIRMAN SAID

These figures are the Chairman's spoken remarks reported from the event, not a published ISRO target document, and should be attributed that way.

- **More than 440 space start-ups** have emerged since the 2020 space-sector reforms
- A forward plan of **eight launch vehicle missions and 12 satellites** in the current financial year
- The **first uncrewed Gaganyaan test flight within about four months**, with roughly **8,000 tests** completed and **three uncrewed flights** planned before a crewed mission
- India currently has **56 space assets**, against a projected requirement of **200 to 300 satellites within five years**

UPSC RELEVANCE

The Gaganyaan uncrewed flight is a

STATED TIMELINE, NOT AN EVENT

. Nothing was launched on National Space Day. Writing that the uncrewed test flight has taken place would be wrong.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The ceremony and the operational picture point in different directions. The framing was "global space leadership", but the same period has seen the PSLV grounded pending ground tests after two consecutive failures, and no successful ISRO launch recorded in 2026 to that point. A plan for eight launches in the financial year is therefore a recovery target as much as an ambition.

440 start-ups is an input, not an output. The 2020 reforms and the creation of IN-SPACe as a single-window authorisation body have clearly produced entrants. The harder question is how many have flown. Skyroot's Vikram-1 is the case that shows the pathway works; the count that matters over the next few years is how many others reach orbit rather than how many are incorporated.

Cadence is the binding constraint, not ideas or money. India's stated need of 200 to 300 satellites against 56 assets today is not primarily a design problem. It is a launch-rate and reliability problem, and it is the reason a second launch pathway through private operators matters more than the start-up count suggests.

The lunar south pole is now contested. Chandrayaan-3's landing gave India a first-mover position in exactly the region that China's Chang'e-7 is now targeting. The follow-on that matters for India is the **India-Japan Lunar Polar Exploration Mission (LUPEX)**, whose purpose is water-ice prospecting rather than a repeat landing.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 3 (Science and Technology): Achievements of Indians in science and technology; [indigenisation](#) of technology and developing new technology; space sector reforms and private participation.

Prelims focus: the date and what it marks; Shiv Shakti Point; the SAC's role; who chairs IN-SPACe versus ISRO; the Bharatiya Antariksh Station target year.

Mains angle: Argue that India's space constraint has migrated from capability to **cadence**. Design and cost-efficiency are proven; what is not yet proven is a launch rate and reliability record consistent with 200 to 300 assets in five years. Then examine whether the 2020 reforms have built a genuine second pathway or a supplier base still dependent on ISRO's ranges, workforce and test facilities.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

NATIONAL SPACE DAY:

Observed on August 23; marks the Chandrayaan-3 Vikram lander touchdown near the lunar south pole, achieved in 2023

2026 is the third edition; national event at the Space Applications Centre, Ahmedabad

Theme: “Towards Viksit Bharat: Innovating, Collaborating and Aspiring to Global Space Leadership”

Landing site designation: Shiv Shakti Point

India was the first country to land near the lunar south polar region, and the fourth to soft-land on the Moon

INSTITUTIONS:

Dr V. Narayanan — Secretary, Department of Space and Chairman, ISRO

Dr Pawan Kumar Goenka — Chairman, IN-SPACe, the single-window authorisation and promotion body created under the 2020 reforms

SAC, Ahmedabad — ISRO’s payloads and space applications centre

NSIL is ISRO’s commercial arm; IN-SPACe is the regulator-promoter. They are different bodies and are often confused

FIGURES STATED AT THE EVENT (ATTRIBUTED TO THE ISRO CHAIRMAN, NOT AN OFFICIAL TARGET DOCUMENT):

440+ space start-ups since the 2020 reforms

8 launch vehicle missions and 12 satellites planned this financial year

First uncrewed Gaganyaan test flight in about four months; three uncrewed flights before a crewed mission; about 8,000 tests completed

56 Indian space assets today; 200 to 300 satellites projected as needed within five years

RELATED TARGETS:

Bharatiya Antariksh Station: 2035

Vikram-1 (Skyroot Aerospace) achieved orbital success earlier in 2026

LUPEX is the India-Japan Lunar Polar Exploration Mission, aimed at water-ice prospecting

Sources: ISRO, PIB

Source: Third National Space Day Marked at Ahmedabad as ISRO Sets Out Its Launch Backlog — Ujjayanti.com |

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