

Govt plans changes in law to allow 12-hour shifts in factories

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The change by Union government will allow companies to extend the daily shift, from the current accepted norm of 8 hours, six days a week (or 48 hours) to up to 12 hours, six days a week (72 hours).

Longer shifts, a change being considered by the Union government, will help in this context as long as the workers are paid proportionately more, something that is part of the plan.

The Union government is considering a change in a 1948 law to allow longer shifts in factories as it works out ways to help factories cope with fewer workers and high demand and all against a context where the ongoing nationwide lockdown is likely to continue beyond April 15.

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According to two senior officials in the know of the matter, a proposal is under “active consideration” **to amend the Factories Act of 1948. Section 51 of the Act says “No adult worker shall be required or allowed to work in a factory for more than forty-eight hours in any week.”**

Although there are provisions of overtime in the same act, which has been providing the key legislative framework in Indian industries for the past 72 years, the feeling in the government is that exceptional circumstances call for exceptional provisions.

One of the eleven empowered groups of senior bureaucrats, the one on “facilitating supply chain and logistics management for availability of necessary items such as food and medicine” is pushing for the amendments to allow up to 12-hours of daily shifts from the 8-hour schedule in factories making essential goods.

An executive at a large consumer products company that also makes essential products said on condition of anonymity that the shortage of workers is a real problem not because his company employs contract workers (it doesn't) but because local administrators have to take a call on how many workers they will allow so-called curfew passes to. In some cases, this person adds, it is 50%. In some, lower.

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