Industrial Accidents in India

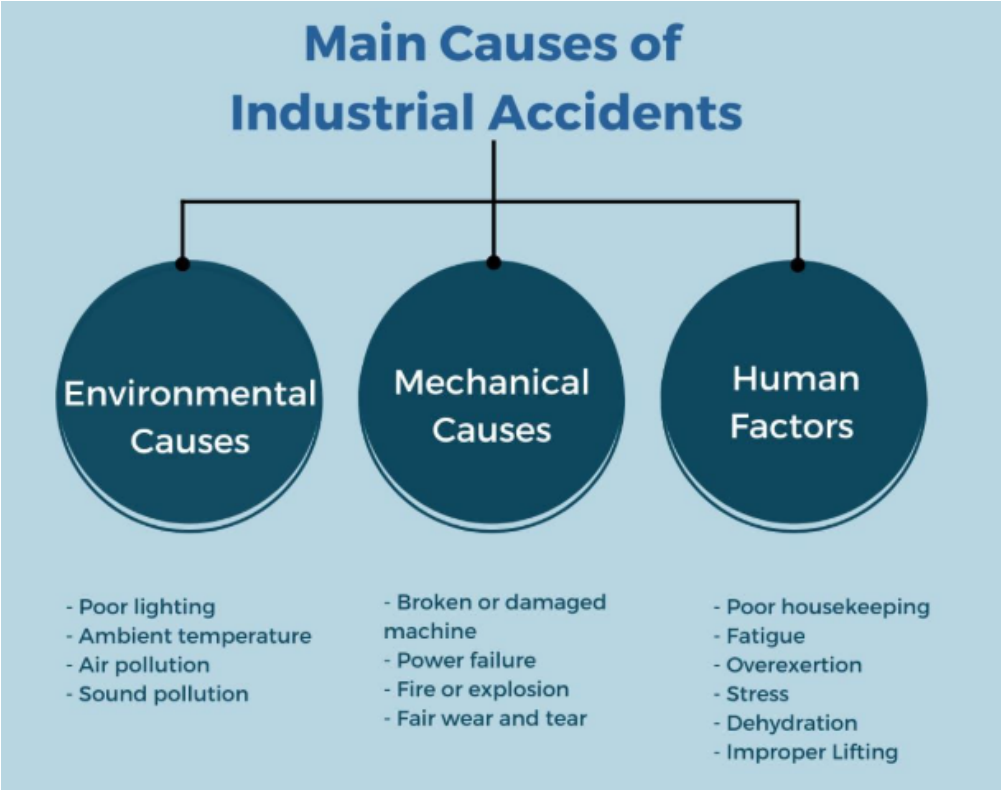
Mains: *GS III - Disaster and Disaster Management*

Why in news?

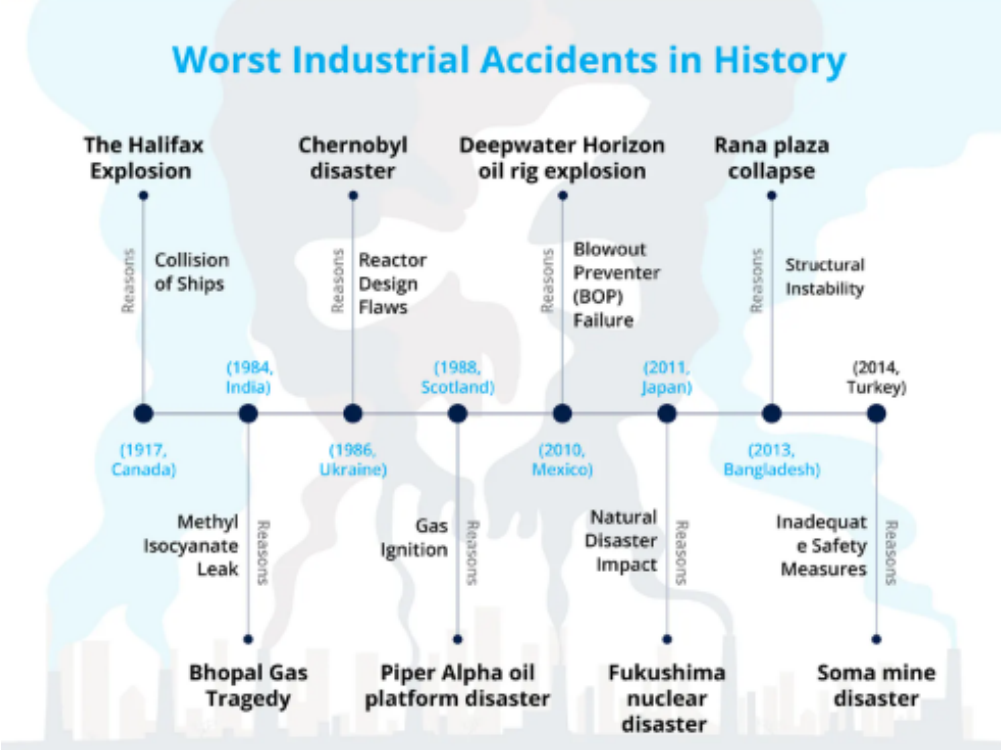
Recently, the explosions at Sigachi Industries in Telangana, and a firecracker unit disaster in Tamil Nadu raised deeper insights on ongoing national crisis of industrial accidents.

What are industrial accidents?

- **Definition** –They are unforeseen, work-related incidents that result in harm, injury, or even death to workers, visitors, or the public.
- **Places of occurrence** – These events typically occur in industrial settings like factories, construction sites, and warehouses.
- **Potential causes** – It is caused by a variety of factors including equipment malfunctions, human error, unsafe conditions, or a failure to follow safety protocols.



- **Notable industrial accidents**



What is the status of India in industrial accidents?

- **Death toll** –According to labour ministry data and Right to information applications, *at least 6,500 workers have lost their lives*.
- This means that nearly *three fatalities occur every day* in Indian industries, construction sites, and mines.
- **Recent case surge** – In Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu alone, over 200 fatalities have occurred in major industrial mishaps over the past decade.
- **Most affected states** – Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh have their own grim records.
    - ***For example**, Gujarat witnessed over 60 major industrial fires and gas leaks in just a single year (2021), according to media and State records.*
- **The hidden toll** — Data from unregistered or informal sector units may be much higher and rarely makes news.
    - A study in 2022 by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) found that India had had over *130 major chemical accidents in just a 30-month window post-2020, with 218 fatalities and 300-plus injuries.*
- Most of these occurred in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often operate under regulatory radar.
- According to the Directorate General Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI), *India records one serious industrial accident every two days in registered factories.*

What are the reasons for increasing industrial accidents?

- **The silence of the public** – There is a large muteness among the general public on the industrial unsafety.
- **Less penalty and conviction** – Convictions for safety lapses are rare, and penalties are often small or even absent.

- **The inactivity of regulators** – The regulators are largely inoperative which decreases the accountability of the industrial management.
    - ***For example**, in no permit-to-work system, high-risk jobs are undertaken casually, with no formal hazard identification or job safety analysis.*
- **Negligence of factories** – Many Factories running without even the basic No-Objection Certificate from the Fire Department.
    - ***For example**, many industries work with no firefighting systems, alarms, sensors, extinguishers, and fire exists.*
- A National Geographic documentary explored how industrial accidents across the world stem from negligence and failed systems.
- **Lack of training** – There is no training, especially for migrant and contract workers who often speak different languages and oblivious to the signage or safety protocols.
- **Cost-cutting compulsion** – Many companies are reducing their expenditure on proper infrastructure and workers safety.
- **Class bias** – The safety lapse in largely occur in the establishment where the migrant workers, contract labourers, and the economically voiceless are employed.

What are the existing laws and provisions regarding industrial safety in India?

- **Factories act, 1948** – It provides safety provisions for hazardous processes.
- **Plantations labour act, 1951** – It focuses on the safety and welfare of workers in plantations.
- **Mines Act, 1952** – It Governs safety and health in mines, including regulations for mining operations and worker welfare.
- **Contract labour (Regulation and Abolition) act, 1970** – It addresses the working conditions and welfare of contract labours, including safety aspects.
- **Environment protection act, 1986** – This act governs usage of chemicals in industries and other establishments.
- **Explosives rules, 2008** – It regulates the storage and handling of fireworks and chemicals.
- **NDMA guidelines on chemical accidents, 2015** – It Provide risk mitigation framework in chemical related disasters.

What needs to be done?

- **Make companies accountable** – Every industrial management should be held responsible for the safety and security arrangements.
    - ***For exampl**e, countries such as South Korea and Singapore now have corporate manslaughter laws, holding senior executives criminally accountable for gross safety failures.*
- **Strengthening labour safety boards** – The regulatory bodies on labour safety should be strengthened to take legal and act without any political influences.
- **Digitise risk reporting** – The reports are to be digitized and periodically reviewed.
- **Embed safety as essential value** – Globally, countries such as Germany and Japan have embedded safety deeply into industrial design and workplace culture.
- **Ensure whistle-blower protection** – The people who expose the safety and other regulatory lapses must be protected.

- **Making industrial safety a right** – Industrial safety should be explicitly made as a fundamental right.

What lies ahead?

- There could be regulatory and better safety audit mechanism in every industrial establishments irrespective of their location, size and ownership.
- There is a need for collective conscience which could solve the crisis in the future.
- As citizens, as industry leaders, as media, as policymakers we need to care.

Reference

The Hindu| Industrial Accidents

