Need For Worker Safety Law

What is the issue?

Major industrial accidents draw attention to the essentiality of stronger worker safety law.

How is occupational safety at present?

- Recent notable industrial accidents include -
  i. deaths of four people, including a senior officer, in a fire at the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation gas facility in Navi Mumbai
  ii. the tragedy that killed nearly two dozen people at a firecracker factory in Batala, Punjab
- A safe work environment is a basic right and India's recent decades of high growth should have ushered in a framework of guarantees.
- But, unfortunately, successive governments have not felt it necessary to ratify many fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- These cover organised and unorganised sector workers' safety, including the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981.
- India's record in promoting occupational and industrial safety remains weak even with years of robust economic growth.
- Making work environments safer remains a low priority, although the productivity benefits of such investments have always been clear.
- The consequences are frequently seen in the form of a large number of fatalities and injuries.
- But despite these, in a market that has a steady supply of labour, policymakers tend to ignore the wider impact of such losses.

What are the concerns in this regard?

- Such incidents make it imperative that the Central government abandon its disregard for dealing with industrial safety challenges.
- The government should engage in serious reform but there is not much evidence of progressive moves.
- The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2019 was introduced in the Lok Sabha in July 2019.
- It aims to combine 13 existing laws relating to mines, factories, dock

workers, building and construction, transport workers, inter-State migrant labour and so on.

- However, it pays little attention to the sector-specific requirements of workers.
- One of its major shortcomings is that formation of safety committees and appointment of safety officers is left to the discretion of State governments.
- Evidently, the narrow stipulation on safety officers confines it to a small fraction of industries.
- The ILO instruments cover several areas of activity that the recent occupational safety Code seeks to amalgamate.
- But, the code comes without the systemic reform that is necessary to empower workers.

What should the priority be?

- The Factories Act currently mandates the appointment of a bipartite committee in units that employ hazardous processes or substances.
- This and such other provisions should certainly be retained in the new code.
- It is essential, therefore, that the new Code is reworked to include the much-needed missing provisions.

Source: The Hindu

