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# The Accidents We Foresee: On Industrial Safety

THE HINDU

11 June 2026

ECONOMY

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# The Accidents We Foresee: On Industrial Safety

 The Hindu

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GS3

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Industrial accidents that kill workers are often called tragic, yet most are predictable and preventable. Where does the duty of care lie, and why does enforcement keep failing?"*

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[The Hindu](#)
 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

HOW

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Each recurring **factory fire, boiler blast or chemical leak** that kills workers is described as a tragedy. But most such **industrial accidents are foreseeable and preventable**, rooted in weak inspection and enforcement. For an aspirant, this is a **GS3 (economy, industry) and GS2 (governance, labour) lead**, with a strong **ethics dimension**: the duty of care that employers and the state owe to workers. The word “tragedy” hides a failure of responsibility.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

India’s recurring **industrial accidents** are largely **foreseeable**, caused by known hazards, blocked exits, untrained workers, disabled safety devices, left unaddressed because **inspection is thin and enforcement weak**. Workers, often informal, pay the price. The framework exists in the **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code**; the failure is implementation. The answer is **enforcement, audits, accountability and a real safety culture**, not resignation.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
<b>Foreseeable hazard</b>	Known, avoidable risks	Accidents are preventable, not fated
<b>Inspection deficit</b>	Thin, stretched labour inspectorate	Norms exist on paper, not on the ground
<b>OSH Code</b>	Consolidated safety law	The framework already exists
<b>Duty of care</b>	Employer/state responsibility for workers	The ethical core of the issue

## THE ANALYSIS: WHY “TRAGEDY” IS THE WRONG WORD

- ❶ **The hazards are known.** Blocked exits, untrained workers and unsafe storage are recurring, avoidable causes.
- ❷ **Enforcement is the gap.** A thin inspectorate and weak oversight leave safety law poorly implemented.
- ❸ **The vulnerable pay.** Informal, low-paid workers have little power to refuse unsafe conditions.
- ❹ **Prevention is cheaper than loss.** The cost of safety is far lower than the cost of lives and trust.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

*the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020, which consolidated multiple earlier labour-safety laws (including the Factories Act, 1948). Machinery: the labour inspectorate; the Directorate General Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DGFASLI); State factory inspectorates. Concepts: duty of care; safety audits; hazard management; the formal-informal divide in enforcement. Rights frame: Article 21 (right to life, including a safe workplace); Directive Principles on humane conditions of work (Article 42). Ethics: corporate social responsibility; accountability; the value of a worker’s life.*

## THE DEBATE

**Argument on competitiveness:** Strict safety compliance raises costs and can hurt industrial competitiveness, and some risk is inherent in industry.

**Argument on duty:** Most accidents are preventable; treating safety as optional violates the duty of care owed to workers and destroys trust.

**The balanced verdict:** Safety and competitiveness are not opposed. Well-run industry treats safety as integral to productivity, and the cost of prevention is far lower than the cost of lives lost. The answer is to **enforce the existing framework** rigorously rather than to dilute it.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*A weak answer accepts the language of fate. The strong answer asks whether the harm was foreseeable and preventable, and if it was, reframes it as a failure of responsibility with identifiable causes and fixes. The move is from sympathy to accountability. The same lens applies to road deaths, building collapses and disaster mismanagement, anywhere “accident” masks neglect.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Known hazards (blocked exits, untrained workers, unsafe storage) + thin inspectorate + weak enforcement + safety seen as cost -> "foreseeable" accidents. The vulnerable: informal, low-power workers bear the harm. The fix: enforce OSH Code + modern inspectorate + safety audits + employer accountability + worker voice -> safety as non-negotiable.

## THE WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Strengthen and modernise the labour inspectorate** and its capacity.
- 2 **Enforce the OSH Code**, with mandatory safety audits, training and hazard management.
- 3 **Ensure real employer accountability** for violations and avoidable deaths.
- 4 **Give workers a genuine voice** through safety committees and grievance channels.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

*“Recurring industrial accidents reflect a failure of safety enforcement, not mere misfortune.” Critically examine, and suggest reforms. (250 words)*

*“An accident that could have been prevented is not a misfortune but a failure; calling it ‘tragedy’ is how responsibility hides.”*

*Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020 · Factories Act, 1948 · DGFASLI · Article 21 (safe workplace) · Article 42 · duty of care.*

*Where does the duty of care for worker safety lie, and why does enforcement keep failing?*

*Connects to GS3 PYQs on industrial development and GS2 on labour governance, and GS4 on corporate responsibility; a probable question is the foreseeability-and-enforcement framing above.*

*static GS3 on industry and labour codes, GS2 on governance and enforcement, and GS4 on duty of care and corporate ethics.*

*Sources: The Hindu, Ministry of Labour and Employment, DGFASLI*

Source: The Accidents We Foresee: On Industrial Safety — Ujiyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

### ● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

**Recurring factory and industrial accidents in India are largely foreseeable and preventable, rooted in weak inspection capacity, poor enforcement and a culture that treats worker safety as a cost rather than a duty; the answer is rigorous enforcement of safety law, not resignation to “tragedy.”**

#### ✓ SUPPORTING

- A large share of industrial deaths arise from known, avoidable hazards, pointing to systemic neglect rather than chance.
- Inspection capacity is thin and enforcement weak, so safety norms exist on paper but are poorly implemented on the ground.

- Workers, often informal and with little bargaining power, bear the cost, raising questions of duty of care and corporate responsibility.

### **COUNTER**

Some argue that heavy safety compliance raises costs and hurts industrial competitiveness and that a degree of risk is inherent in industry.

### **WAY FORWARD**

Strengthen the labour inspectorate, enforce the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, mandate safety audits and training, ensure employer accountability and worker participation, and build a genuine safety culture.

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### **MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

#### **QUESTION**

*"Recurring industrial accidents reflect a failure of safety enforcement, not mere misfortune." Critically examine, and suggest reforms. (250 words)*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

When a factory fire or a boiler blast kills workers, it is called a tragedy, a word that implies fate. But most industrial accidents are not fated; they are foreseen, and therefore preventable.

#### **BODY**

The pattern is depressingly familiar: blocked exits, untrained workers, disabled safety devices, unsafe storage of chemicals, and buildings that violate norms. These are not freak events but known hazards left unaddressed.

The root causes are systemic. India's labour inspectorate is thin and stretched, so safety standards that exist on paper are weakly enforced on the ground; many units, especially in the informal sector, operate outside effective oversight; and safety is often treated as a cost to be minimised rather than a duty to be met.

The workers who pay the price are frequently informal, poorly paid and with little power to refuse unsafe conditions, which raises a clear question of duty of care and corporate responsibility. The counter-argument, that strict compliance burdens industry and a measure of risk is unavoidable, has limited force: well-run industry treats safety as integral to productivity, and the cost of prevention is far lower than the cost of lives lost and trust destroyed.

The framework already exists in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, which consolidated earlier laws; the failure is in implementation. The way forward is to strengthen and modernise the inspectorate, mandate safety audits, training and proper hazard management, ensure real employer accountability for violations, and give workers a genuine voice in safety through committees and grievance channels, building a culture in which safety is non-negotiable.

### CONCLUSION

An accident that could have been prevented is not a misfortune but a failure. India owes its workers a safety regime that is enforced, not merely promised.

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