

Key Labour Reforms Bill may Include 50 Changes: Officials

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The Government is also likely to modify some clauses of the bill to cater to the specific needs of women workers employed in the ship-breaking, software, and textile industries. (Bloomberg image)

The long-awaited **Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSH)** Code bill, one of the four key labour reforms, might be overhauled to include at least 50 Amendments, Government officials said on Monday.

The bill is awaiting Parliament's approval but the standing committee on labour has suggested 56 Amendments to it. After a detailed study of the recommendations of the panel, officials handling the bill have said that the Government has indicated its readiness to include at least 50 of these.

The panel, led by Biju Janata Dal leader Bhartruhari Mahtab submitted its report on the bill on February 11.

According to the officials, who asked not to be named, the Amendments in the **OSH** Code will likely widen the definition of **contract labours in clause Clause 2(1) (m)** of the bill, specifically mentioning cinema and entertainment industry workers apart from others.

The Government may also categorically mention "**Highly Skilled**" in the definition of building workers as their wages differ from **Skilled and Unskilled** workers in this sector and make clear provisions spelling out the "Responsibility/ Accountability of the Contractors towards the contract Labourers deployed by them".

The proposed changes also include penalties for non-payment of wages and abdication of other duties, the officials said.

The Government is also likely to modify some clauses of the bill to cater to the specific needs of women workers employed in the **ship-breaking, software, and textile industries**.

The panel's report has also highlighted the need to review the eight-hour work day stipulated in the first ILO convention in 1913. It has pointed out that in several businesses including software people work for more than eight hours. However, the officials said it isn't clear whether the Government will sign off on changing the duration of the work-day.

But in a key policy shift, the ministry may remove the difference between workers and employees in so far as welfare facilities are concerned, the officials confirmed. The Government may make no discrimination between workers and employees while providing canteen, rest room or crèche facilities, they said. It may also allow common crèche facilities, as against the current norm of individual crèche in factories, to allow a cluster of small scale industries to pool their resources for setting up of a common crèche.

The Government may also make an explicit provision to notify appointment of a Safety Officer in all establishments, especially dealing with hazardous processes including Building and Construction activities, even with less than the stipulated 500 workers, the officials said.

The OSH Code is one of the four labour codes that aim to reform the archaic and complex labour laws in order to inject flexibility and lure investors. **The OSH Code** aims to improve working conditions to take care of the health of workers. It stipulates various welfare measures including **hours of work, overtime hours, leave, holiday, etc.**

Out of the four codes, the code on wages has been cleared by Parliament. The remaining three are awaiting clearance.

Achirangshu Acharya, economist with Viswabharati University said, “The concept of replacing myriad labour laws into four codes is a good decision that helps to cut down on red-tapism. The OSH code holds the key to improve Indian export market and sending a right message about workers welfare. But the Government has to also ensure its proper implementation.”