

## **LS passes Factories Amendment Bill to increase overtime hours for workers**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed the Factories Amendment Bill to increase the overtime limit of factory workers from 50 hours to 100 hours in a quarter.

It also proposes to increase the overtime working hours for factories with “exceptional” workload from 75 hours to 115 hours in a quarter. Further, Centre or states may increase this overtime limit to 125 hours in a quarter in the “public interest.”

“The need for increasing overtime hours is based on the demand from industries so that factories can carry out the work on urgent basis,” the Bill said.

Significantly, the Central government has been empowered to make exempting rules and orders related to the overtime hours in a quarter “to ensure uniformity”. At present, only state governments are empowered to pass exempting orders related to the overtime hours. The Centre has also empowered itself to frame rules under the Act on issues related to terms and conditions of the workers in a factory and make separate rules related to fixed working hours, period of rest among others for persons engaged in urgent repair work.

The Bill will now be introduced in the Rajya Sabha. The Union government didn’t table the detailed amendments to the Factories Bill which were introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2014 and later referred to the Standing Committee. Labour Minister Bandaru Dattatreya said that “since consideration and passing” of the detailed Bill “may take some more time” in Parliament, the present Bill amending only two clauses were introduced “to facilitate ease of doing business so as to enhance employment opportunities.”

Revolutionary Socialist Party MP NK Premachandran said the Bill was introduced in a “very hasty manner” and had “far reaching consequences.” Some MPs raised concerns that the Bill sought to take away the powers of the state governments in framing the rules under the Factories Act. “We are not taking away any rights of the state governments...The Central government is only making an addition. All the executive powers will remain with the state governments,” Mr. Dattatreya said.

Mr. Dattatreya said certain safeguards were taken to protect the interest of the workers such as not allowing anyone to work for more than 12 hours in a day and the provisions supported the International Labour Organisation framework.

The Union Cabinet also gave an ex-post facto approval to the introduction of the Factories Amendment Bill of 2016 in Parliament.

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