



EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

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Long Working Hours Debate

Syllabus: GS1/ Indian Economy & Related Issues

In News

- Recently, the Infosys founder Narayana Murthy sparked a huge debate over working hours by suggesting that the young generation should work 70 hours a week.

About the Working Hours in India

- **History of working Hours in India:**
 - The **first Indian Factories Act** came into force in **1891** to address the **working-age and conditions of children**.
 - It was not until **1911** that an **amended (Factories) act** was enforced to **reduce the working duration** per day to **12 hours**, with a single weekly off.
 - **Post World War I, in 1922**, with recommendations from the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)**, the maximum weekly hour for an adult worker was **brought down to 60 hours**.
 - A **revised Factories Act of 1948** (independent India) further reduced this to **48 hours per week and 9 hours a day**, as the maximum permissible working duration for an adult worker in India.
- **The new Labour Codes brought the following changes in the working hours in India:**
 - **Weekly and daily working hours** are capped at **48 hours and 12 hours**, respectively.
 - **4-day work week will be feasible**; 12 hour working day for each of the 4 days of the week.
 - **Maximum overtime hours** for workers increased from 50 hours in the Factories Act to 125 hours through the new codes.
 - The **overtime policy** also allows employers to contact workers on weekends, **as per requirement**.

Arguments Supporting Long Working Hours

- **Working to make India an economic superpower:**
 - According to few, the specific circumstances of India, which are different from those of a few developed economies, make it

important for the country **not to adopt "shorter work weeks"** as the norm.

- We have to **make India an economic superpower** that we can all be proud of in India 2047.
- The **greatest strength of India is its youth** and in the country's journey to become a superpower, this generation needs to prioritise work over leisure.
- **Working 'longer' for 'self':**
 - According to few, the 'longer working hours' is not limited to the company. It can be thought as - work 40 hours for the company but work 30 hours for yourself.
 - Invest the 10,000 hours that makes one a master in one's subject to become an expert in your field.
- **Personal economic development:**
 - Assuming that the employer is paying for working for long hours, it is a straight way to get a bigger paycheck.
 - Depending on the legal framework, the wage for additional time can be either regular one or higher than paid usually.
- **Personal Skill improvement:**
 - Working for long hours is an opportunity to polish skills and gain new experiences.
 - In the end, it is not about how many years one was working in the industry or a particular position, but how his or her skill will support the company.
 - Working for longer hours can bring years of experience squeezed in a much shorter time.
- **Improving value for Organization:**
 - Companies value employees who are productive – they deliver value the end-client looks for.
 - Considering that, working for longer hours boosts the employee's value in the organization, securing his or her position, and improving the performance.
- **Double-job by Women:**
 - Some have also pointed out that most women worked much more than 70 hours a week - at both the office and their homes.

Arguments Opposing Long working hours

- **Already low salaries:**
 - Some of the criticism came from people who pointed out the starting salaries - typically on the low end - for engineers in Indian technology companies including Infosys.
- **Indians already work long hours:**

- No time to socialise, no time to talk to family, no time to exercise, no time for recreation. Not to mention companies expect people to answer emails and calls after work hours also.
- According to the ILO report, Indians worked an average of more than 2,000 hours every year before the pandemic, much higher than the US, Brazil and Germany.
- **Physical and mental health issues:**
 - There are many physical and mental health issues that could arise from working without a break.
 - In a first global analysis of the loss of life and health associated with working long hours, WHO and ILO estimate that, in 2016, 398 000 people died from stroke and 347 000 from heart disease as a result of having worked at least 55 hours a week.
 - Between 2000 and 2016, the number of deaths from heart disease due to working long hours increased by 42%, and from stroke by 19%.
- **‘Work-life balance’ as better fetching tool:**
 - Companies that implement work-life balance policies benefit from increased retention of current employees, improved recruitment, lower rates of absenteeism and higher productivity, said the International Labour Organization (ILO) in a report released recently.

Global Scenario

- While India debates longer working hours, **some developed countries have been experimenting with four-day work weeks.**
- In 2022, **Belgium** changed laws to give workers the right to work four days a week without a salary reduction.
- Several companies in the **UK** recently participated in a six-month trial scheme, organised by **4 Day Week Global** which campaigns for a shorter week.
 - At the end of the trial, 56 of the 61 companies that took part said they would continue with the four-day week.
 - A report assessing the scheme's impact in the UK found that it had "extensive benefits", particularly for employees' well-being. Its authors argued it could herald a shift in attitudes.

Way ahead

- The debate comes at a time when around the world, the Covid-19 pandemic has made people re-evaluate their relationship with work.
 - Many felt that they were more productive when they worked from home while others advocated for a healthy work-life balance.
- Boosting productivity isn't just about working longer hours. It's about getting better at what you do - upskilling, having a positive work environment and fair pay for the work done.

Daily Mains Question

[Q] What is the significance of longer working hours in making India an economic superpower? Differentiate it by citing arguments Opposing Long working hours.