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**RIGHT TO DISCONNECT IN INDIA**

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## RIGHT TO DISCONNECT IN INDIA

### Context

- The unfortunate death of an EY employee, allegedly due to work pressure has brought the discussion of **bringing the right to disconnect in India.**

### About

- **Overworking** has become deeply ingrained in many sectors across India.
- Employees often **work overtime and even on their off-days.**
- The idea that work should take precedence has been **deeply embedded in the Indian work culture.**

### Right to Disconnect

- The Right to Disconnect law is a regulation that empowers employees to ignore work-related communications—be it emails, text messages, or phone calls— outside of their official work hours.
- The law was introduced to combat the increasing intrusion of work into personal lives, a problem that has intensified since the Covid-19 pandemic and blurred the boundaries between work and home.
- **Countries Having the Law:**
  - ♦ Australia recently enacted the laws for right to disconnect.
  - ♦ By enacting this law, Australia joins about two dozen other countries, mainly in Europe and Latin America, that have similar regulations.
  - ♦ France was one of the pioneers in implementing its right to disconnect in 2017.

### Status in India

- India does not have specific laws recognising the right to disconnect from work.
- **Article 38 of the Constitution** mandates that “the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people”.
- **Article 39(e) of the Directive Principles of State Policy** directs the state to direct its policy towards securing the strength and health of its workers.
- **A bill named Right to Disconnect** was also introduced in India in **2018.**
  - ♦ The bill aimed to provide employees with the right to not respond to work-related calls and emails after working hours.
  - ♦ The bill has yet to gain significant legislative traction.

### How Overworking Affects Productivity?

- **Decreased Efficiency:** Working beyond your capacity decreases efficiency. Tasks that usually take a short time might start taking longer, and mistakes become more common, requiring additional time to correct.
- **Burnout:** Overworking can lead to burnout—a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress.
- **Reduced Creativity:** Overworking stifles creativity because the brain is too focused on just getting through tasks rather than thinking innovatively.
- **Work-Life Imbalance:** Overworking disrupts the balance between work and personal life, leading to dissatisfaction and resentment, which can spill over into work, further reducing overall productivity.

### Arguments in favour of Right to Disconnect

- **Mental Health and Well-being:** Ensures employees can disconnect from work after hours, reducing stress, anxiety, and burnout, promoting better mental health.
- **Work-life Balance:** Encourages a balance between professional and personal lives, enhancing overall quality of life, family relationships, and personal well-being.

- **Increased Productivity:** Employees who are well-rested and have time to recharge tend to be more focused and productive during working hours.
- **Prevention of Exploitation:** Helps avoid overwork and exploitation by employers who may expect employees to be constantly available.
- **Legal Protection:** Provides legal protection against being contacted or expected to work beyond regular hours.
- **Global Best Practice:** Many countries have adopted this right to safeguard workers' rights, and India can align with international labor standards, improving its reputation as a progressive work environment.
- **Reduction in Workplace Disputes:** With clear boundaries between work and personal time, conflicts over work expectations and burnout may be reduced, leading to a healthier workplace culture.

### Arguments Against Right to Disconnect

- **Flexibility for Employers:** In certain industries (like IT, healthcare, etc.), employees may need to be available beyond office hours for urgent tasks or client needs. Imposing a strict disconnect policy could hinder flexibility.
- **Impact on Business Growth:** Small and medium-sized businesses may find it difficult to manage if employees are unavailable outside work hours, affecting responsiveness and growth.
- **Enforcement Challenges:** Monitoring compliance with the Right to Disconnect can be difficult, especially in remote work environments, leading to potential misuse or inefficiency in implementation.
- **Potential for Reduced Responsiveness:** In sectors where timely decision-making and communication are critical, restricting after-hours contact could slow down processes and affect performance.

### Way Ahead

- As the debate continues over whether Indian employees should have the right to disconnect after office hours, the implications of extending work hours must be carefully weighed.
- On one hand, increased work hours could significantly boost the country's growth and provide greater earning opportunities for workers and on the other, it may lead to decreased productivity and contribute to employee burnout.
- The balance between economic benefits and the well-being of workers is crucial.

### Source: TH

#### Mains Practice Question

Critically analyze the implementation of Right to Disconnect in India.

