



Right to Disconnect Bill

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Context: A Private Member's Bill has been introduced in Parliament proposing the establishment of an **Employees' Welfare Authority** to institutionalise the **Right to Disconnect**. The Bill seeks to legally enable employees to decline work-related calls, emails, and digital communication **beyond designated working hours and on holidays**, without adverse consequences.

Private Member's Bill

A Private Member's Bill refers to legislation introduced by any Member of Parliament **other than a Minister**. While such bills rarely become law, they play a crucial role in:

- Highlighting gaps in existing policy frameworks
- Initiating debate on emerging socio-economic issues
- Nudging the executive towards reform

What is the Right to Disconnect?

The Right to Disconnect is a statutory protection that allows employees to **disengage from work during non-work hours**, ensuring that they are not obligated to respond to:

- Work-related phone calls
- Emails
- Messaging platforms
- Any form of electronic communication

The principle is grounded in **Article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**, which guarantees the right to rest, leisure, and reasonable limitation of working hours.

Rationale and Importance of the Right to Disconnect

1. Escalating Work-Related Stress

- The digital work environment has blurred the boundary between professional and personal life.
- Persistent expectations of availability contribute to **burnout, anxiety, reduced sleep quality**, and long-term mental health concerns.

2. Productivity Considerations

- Empirical studies indicate a marked drop in efficiency once working hours exceed **50 hours per week**, making over-connectivity counterproductive.
- Chronic overwork diminishes innovation, decision-making quality, and overall output.

3. Socio-Psychological Harm

- Extended work hours erode work-life balance, weaken social ties, and contribute to isolation.

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- *Illustration:* The 2024 case involving the death of an Ernst & Young employee in Pune sparked national debate around workplace culture and overwork.

4. Labour Rights and Dignity

- Continuous digital engagement effectively amounts to **unpaid labour**, violating the principle of **fair and humane conditions of work**.

Constitutional Foundations

Article 21 – Right to Life and Dignity

- The Supreme Court has interpreted Article 21 to include **quality of life**, mental well-being, and humane working conditions.
- The Right to Disconnect flows naturally from these protections.

Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs)

- **Article 39(e):** Mandates that the health and strength of workers are not abused.
- **Article 42:** Directs the State to ensure **just and humane conditions of work**.
- Together, they create a normative basis for recognising rest and leisure as integral to labour welfare.

Why This Issue Matters for India

- India's expanding **gig economy**, hybrid work models, and digitalisation of workplaces have intensified expectations of round-the-clock availability.
- Legislative interventions like the Right to Disconnect are increasingly viewed as essential for:
 - Safeguarding mental health
 - Promoting sustainable productivity
 - Creating equitable employer-employee relationships
 - Ensuring alignment with global labour standards