

DATE: 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2018, Sunday

## Current Affairs

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Sources: THE HINDU and Indian Express

### **11. Right to know: Now just drop into a govt. office to access information**

#### **News:**

- Maharashtra government has taken a step forward for citizens seeking data from the government under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, by allowing them to study the relevant files at the concerned office on Monday afternoons.
- RTI applications have been on the decline for the last two years since a citizen finds that the system is obscuring and blocking the information.
- The directive is aimed to reduce the number of first and second appeals.
- Under this all government offices ranging from district level to lower level, and municipal corporations, municipal councils, and Zilla Parishad will make files available for applicants to inspect between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. every Monday.
- If there is a public holiday on Monday, the information can be accessed on the next working day.
- **Significance:**
  - This step will smoothen the access to information for the citizens.
  - The move will also help to curb the rising number of pending appeals with the Maharashtra State Information Commission from applicants against departments denying or withholding information.
  - Around 39,709 appeals and complaints were pending since 2014 (By the end of September 2018).

### **12. India maternity laws need serious tweaking**

**NEWS:** A study of Maternity benefit act by Team lease Services highlighted that poor legislation remains the main reason behind India's persistently low female labour force participation rate.

- When the provisions of the amendment to the Maternity Benefit Act came into force effective 1 April 2017, it was lauded by industry as a progressive step towards improvement in securing the employment rights of women.

- Team Lease conducted a study in May on the effects of the amendment on women's employment and on representation of female workforce in India by surveying employers across 10 key sectors.
- **Findings**
  - The amendment had led to higher caution on the part of the employers, leading to lower levels of hiring of women.
  - According to the study, there could be significant job losses for women in India in the short to medium term.
  - India offers one of the world's most generous maternity leave policies.
  - But India is also probably the only country where the entire financial burden of the maternity leave is supposed to be borne by the employer.
  - In most countries, the **cost of maternity leave is shared across** the government, employer, insurance and other social security programmes (**In Singapore—eight weeks is shared by the employer and eight weeks by the public funds; In Australia and Canada—100% is shared by the public funds; In France—social insurance scheme share 100%; In Brazil—mixed contribution from the employer, employee and the government**).
- **Remedial measures suggested** in the Team Lease study for addressing and mitigating this issue include
  - The cost sharing between the employer and the government by way of reimbursement once the employer furnishes the proof of payment of maternity leave wage.
  - The slab-based tax rebates offered by the government on actual maternity wages paid.
  - To set up a government insurance scheme to pay for maternity wages.
  - Sharing the leave in the form of 13 months maternity and 13 months paternity to avoid any possibility of gender bias.

### 13. **The Ministry of Labour's proposal for wage reimbursement**

- **7 weeks wages reimbursed-** wages equivalent to only seven weeks shall be reimbursed by the government of India to employers who employ female workers and provide maternity benefits of 26 weeks' paid leave.
- **Incentive to the entity if** the female employees working in the entity concerned should be earning wages less than ₹15,000.
- **Member of EPFO but not ESIC – Female worker has to be a member of Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO)** for at least one year and must not be covered under ESIC.
- The conditions discussed above lack logic or reasoning as:

- a) entitlement to maternity benefits kicks in once an employee completes 80 days (less than three months) of continuous service, and
- b) An employee is entitled to the benefits under the proposed incentive only if she has been a contributing member of EPFO for at least a year and is not covered under ESIC.
- **Lack of clarity in providing creche facility-** The added provisions such as crèches with certain prerequisites (caretakers, visits by mothers, suitable location) that are mandatory for commissioning mothers lack clarity.
- **The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, as amended from time to time, is a state government legislation,** implying thereby that state governments may amend the Act from time to time to extend benefits higher and incremental to the benefits recommended by the central government.
- **What needs to be done**
  - The **reimbursement limit of seven weeks** must be extended to a minimum of **13 weeks**.
  - The 13 weeks period of wages could also be **extended to all female employees** who are not covered under ESIC, without any preconditions on wage ceiling or the membership of the provident fund organization for one year, etc.
  - Again, **crèches with all the attendant facilities** should be set up by the government as proposed in the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, and allow employees eligible for such benefits to use these crèches at a very nominal cost.
  - It should bring the Maternity Benefit Act under **central legislation** and will also help maintain uniformity.
- **Way ahead**
  - Such changes in the Act will likely encourage employers to provide employment opportunities to women without any gender discrimination and thus bring women into the mainstream of India's progress.
  - Also, hiring and employee retention will no doubt improve.
  - This may raise India's overall female labour force participation from the present 26% to a competitive level like China's 60%.

#### **14. Govt, RBI in talks to allow use of QR code-based 'offline Aadhaar**


##### **News:**

Government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are planning to allow the use of 'offline Aadhaar' that depends on QR codes, instead of the biometric eKYC, for operating payment wallets, opening bank accounts and purchasing insurance covers.

- The move is to address the fears over surveillance, breach of privacy while sharing the Aadhaar number and the biometric verification.
- The newly suggested methods will not require sharing of biometrics or involve UIDAI servers for Authentication.
- The offline KYC process will not need users to reveal their Aadhaar numbers.

**IN A JIFFY, WITHOUT THE JITTERS**

QR CODE OPTION:	PAPERLESS LOCAL eKYC:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Aadhaar printouts offer 3 QR codes for offline verification. Two have demographic info plus photo, one only demographics. Code is tamper proof. UID number is not revealed.</li> <li>➤ Can be downloaded from Aadhaar site, presented to any service provider who can download QR code reader application or procure scanner.</li> <li>➤ QR code eliminates need for finger print or iris authentication, does not involve Aadhaar server. Other ID documents like passport, PAN card or driving licence do not have such offline verification.</li> <li>➤ QR code eliminates risk of forgery, fraud, photoshop of eAadhaar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Aadhaar offers downloadable offline eKYC which is digitally signed secure document. It contains as much demographic info as you want, with five options. Apart from name and address, other demographics like gender, date of birth, mobile, email and photo are optional</li> <li>➤ It can be verified offline and electronically transferred to a service provider. It can be in an electronic or printed format. Much more reliable than other forms of ID</li> <li>➤ Advantage of both QR code and paperless eKYC is that there is no submission of biometrics and authentication through UIDAI server, addressing fears of data tracking and collection</li> </ul>



Name: XXXX  
DOB: XX-XX-XXXX  
Gender: MALE  
0000 1111 2222

- The service provider can download a QR code reader from the UIDAI site or get scanner that can read the code on an Aadhaar number printout.
- This will fulfil Supreme Court's order of ruling out Aadhaar authentication for private firms.