

Addapedia Editorial Analysis 18th June 2024

Menstrual leave

(The Hindu, 18/06/24)

Karnataka government has started consultations on providing one-day paid menstrual leave for women in factories, IT, garment sectors, and MNCs

It comes after a debate sparked by a Union Minister opposing menstrual leave, citing potential discrimination against women.

What are the arguments for menstrual leave?

- **Destigmatizes menstruation:** By openly acknowledging menstruation as a natural biological process, menstrual leave can help break down the stigma surrounding it.
- **Supports women's health and well-being:** Menstruation can cause physical discomfort, cramping, fatigue, and mood swings for some women. Menstrual leave allows women to take a day to rest and manage their symptoms without penalty. This can improve their overall health and well-being.
- **Addresses presenteeism and Boosts productivity:** Menstrual leave can reduce presenteeism, when employees are at work but unproductive due to menstrual discomfort.
- **Protect reproductive health:** In many South Asian Countries, menstrual leave is essentially treated as 'protected parenthood' to prevent any possible impairment to reproductive capability.

What are the arguments against menstrual leave?

- **Potential for discrimination:** Employers might be less likely to hire women or give them promotions if they believe they will take more leave days
- **Financial implications for businesses:** Businesses would have to bear the cost of paid menstrual leave, which could be a burden for some companies.
- **Operational challenges:** Managing leave, especially if multiple employees take it at once, could disrupt workflow and project timelines. Colleagues might have to take on additional tasks when someone is on period leave, potentially increasing stress
- **Alternatives:** Some argue that existing sick leave policies should be sufficient to accommodate menstrual cramps and other symptoms.

What is the situation in other countries?

- **Soviet Russia:** Introduced paid menstrual leave in the 1920s but revoked it in 1927.
- **South Korea:** Paid leave on request of one day per month since 1953.
- **Japan:** Paid leave on request introduced in 1947.
- **Zambia:** Provides paid leave of one day per month.
- **Indonesia:** Has had paid leave on request for two days per month or additional payment for work on those days since 1948. This policy was amended in 2003 to allow negotiation between employers and employees.
- **Spain:** Offers three to five days of leave with a doctor's note.
- **Taiwan:** Provides paid leave of three days per month on request since 2003
- **Bihar (India):** Provides biological leave of two days per month for all female government employees, including contract workers, since 1992.
- **Kerala (India):** Offers menstrual leave for female students in universities under the Department of Higher Education since 2023.

Can you answer the following question?

Should workplaces offer paid menstrual leave policies, and if so, how can they be designed to balance employee well-being with operational needs and workplace fairness?

The last continent must remain a pristine wilderness

(The Hindu, 18/06/24)

The 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM-46), that was held in Kochi, Kerala last month, highlighted the ongoing debate on Antarctic tourism. While the meeting sought to bring in a regulatory framework, it ultimately fell short of a definitive solution.

What are the current regulations for Antarctic tourism?

The current governance framework for Antarctic tourism is fragmented and lacks clear regulations.

- The **Antarctic Treaty**, which came into force in 1961, prioritizes peaceful use and scientific research.
- While the **Madrid Protocol** offers broad environmental guidelines, it does not contain specific regulations for tourism activities.
- The responsibility for day-to-day management falls largely on the **International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO)**, a self-regulatory industry body.
- However, many believe that IAATO's guidelines are inadequate to address the growing environmental pressures of tourism
 - For example, IAATO guidelines recommend limitations on passenger numbers for landings and shore excursions, but there are no set limits.
 - IAATO also encourages the use of low-polluting fuels, but there are no mandatory requirements.

Why is there a need to regulate tourism in Antarctica?

- Unlike other continents, Antarctica does not have an indigenous population.
- Its isolated and pristine environment makes it an alluring destination for tourists.
- The number of tourists has risen from 8,000 in 1993 to 1,05,000 in 2022, exceeding the number of scientists.
- Currently, Indian Antarctic tourism is minimal. However, with growing prosperity, it could become a future benefit

Why is Antarctica tourism a concern?

Unlike other continents, Antarctica is pristine and untouched by humans. Increased tourism could lead to:

- Pollution from ships and visitors
- Accidents disrupting the unique ecosystem
- Unease about potential future territorial claims, favoring countries with more tourist presence.

Why couldn't the recent Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM-46) agree on a new framework?

- Unanimous agreement is needed from all member countries, and some prioritize economic benefits from tourism over environmental protection.
- Additionally, the current geopolitical climate makes international cooperation difficult.

What are some ideas for making Antarctic tourism more sustainable?

- Stronger environmental protection measures, robust monitoring programs, and increased international cooperation are all crucial.
- The recent ATCM discussions on a new framework offer a hopeful sign.
- **India's Stand:** India has raised concerns about the environmental impact of tourism and called for a comprehensive debate. Despite the lack of international consensus, India enacted its own Antarctic Law in 2022.