Menstruation Benefits Bill

What is the issue?

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- Menstruation Benefits Bill was tabled as a private member bill in the Parliament earlier in the year.
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- It is imperative to look at the significance of the provisions, for a gender sensitive labour policy.
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What is the bill on?

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- It seeks to provide working women two days of paid menstrual leave every month.
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- It applies to women working in both public and private sectors.
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- The Bill also seeks to provide better facilities for rest at the workplace during menstruation.
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- It includes providing women the flexibility to take time off, and with options like working from home.
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- The benefits are also extended to female students of Class VIII and above in government recognised schools.
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Is this a new idea?

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- Paid menstrual leave has been in practice since long time back.

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- Bihar has had special leave for women for two days since 1992.
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- Although, it is not explicitly referred to as the menstruation leave.
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- Women can decide which two days of the month they would like to take off.
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- Also, they do not have to provide any justification for doing so.
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- In the recent past, some private companies in India have started offering menstrual leave.
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- Several countries such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, etc also have menstrual leave provisions.
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What are the concerns with it?

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- It would prejudice employers against hiring women and lead to their alienation at work.
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- Most women are capable of functioning at full capacity even during their periods.
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- So, for the handful of women who do suffer unbearable symptoms, the existing sick leave option is adequate.
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- Menstrual leave policies might discriminate against men.
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- This is because women would get additional days off every year.
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- However, the counter arguments are largely a reflection of continuing age old gender biases.
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Why is menstrual leave significant?

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- Menstruation is a perfectly natural biological process, not a disease or a

disability.
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- However, it can range from a slightly discomforting to a severely debilitating experience for women.
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- Nearly 20% of women suffer from uncomfortable symptoms.
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- These may include cramps, nausea, fever and weakness during their periods.
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- These are debilitating enough to hamper their daily activities.
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- Some women also experience reduced emotional control and decreased concentration.
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- Over 25 million women suffer from endometriosis.
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- This is a chronic condition in which period pain is so bad that women nearly pass out from it.
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- It is true that periods are weakening only for some women.
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- But the numbers are not insignificant to avoid a policy decision.
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What is the way forward?

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- The Bill takes gender equity discourse forward in a constructive and balanced manner.
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- **Implementation** - Policy formulation would be meaningful only if backed by enforcement measures.
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- Evidently, women are continued to be laid off for demanding maternity entitlements.
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- **Participation** - Menstrual leave policies must be introduced alongside measures to increase workforce participation of women.
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- Worryingly, the female workforce participation rate in the country has

declined from 36% in 2005-06 to 24% in 2015-16.
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- Measures aimed at reversing this decline are crucial.
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- **Workplace** - Efforts at making workplaces more inclusive and gender sensitive is essential.
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- Separate toilets for men and women with facilities for disposal of sanitary napkins should be ensured.
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- The Parliament should take up the Bill on menstrual leave and hold a discussion on it soon.
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Source: BusinessLine

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