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Title: Need to revamp the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.

SHRI HARISH MEENA (DAUSA): I draw Government's attention to the widely prevalent discrimination against pregnant women in the corporate sector in the country and the need to revamp the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.

The statutory guidelines framed in 1961 allow 12 weeks of paid maternity leave for women in private sector. However the Indian household has undergone a drastic change from 1961 to 2016 with significant increase of women participation in labour market, mainly urban areas.

I am concerned with alarming reports of discrimination faced by women in the economic sphere of their life. Survey shows one-fourth of highly educated women in urban areas abandon their professional careers and at least 11% face dismissal at work due to pregnancy. Most employers are not generous to respect the dignity of Motherhood and this has put huge burden on middle class mothers trying to strike balance between their careers and family. India is also at the bottom amongst South Asian countries in breastfeeding practices, with more than 50% children born every year deprived of optimal feeding practices.

To safeguard working women and their rights to remain self-reliant and economically independent, revised maternity plan is the need of the hour. A recent study by Booz and Company says that if men and women are employed equally in India, the nation's GDP might go up by 27%. Few organizations in India such as Flipkart, Accenture, Google, Facebook, Godrej, HUL, SAP Labs have allowed more than 3 months of maternity leave to their employees. However, this is not being practiced in majority of the private sector organizations where women employees continue to be discriminated against.

In the light of above, I would like the government to expedite the proposal made by WCD Ministry to extend Maternity Leave period in private sector and bring in place a legislation that makes it mandatory for the private sector to provide for six months of Maternity Leave.