

GOVT SIGNALS SOCIAL MEDIA FOR WAGE COMMUNICATION AMID PRIVACY ROW

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Experts fear the move increases risk of data theft and breaches employee-employer confidentiality pact

The Union [labour ministry](#) seems keen to institutionalize social media and proposes to use "[WhatsApp](#) and other social media" platforms for salary communication when the new labour codes are implemented in a couple of months.

The move comes amid growing concerns over data privacy and raises the fear that it may facilitate access to financial and social security details of workers by social media platforms, labour economists and cyber security experts said.

It heightens concerns over data theft and financial profiling and increases the risk of violation of the employee-employer payment confidentiality system and financial fraud even at the lower rung of the working class, cyber security experts said.

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"All payment, including wages, to the workers shall be made by crediting in the bank account of the worker on electronic mode or digital form. Intimation to the payment made to a worker shall be sent to him through short messaging service (SMS) or e-mail or social media communication such as WhatsApp or by issuing a slip," the Union labour ministry has proposed in its draft standing orders for the service sector, manufacturing sector, and mining sector.

The draft orders have been put in the public domain for comments and will be finalized and made part of the Industrial Relation (IR) Code Act after a month.

The draft standing orders have not been well thought through and there are contradictions in different clauses and it seems an attempt at institutionalization of social media in salary communication, said K.R. Shyam Sundar, a labour economist and professor at XLRI, Jamshedpur.

"What the draft standing orders convey is that under law, salary information and salary statements can be communicated through WhatsApp and social media platforms. What the draft fails to convey is how this will provide financial privacy to employees and employers. This will lead to a clear breach of confidentiality agreement in employee and employer relations. This is almost rewriting of confidentiality requirements," he added.

"Social media by its function and definition is largely informal. How can that be made part of salary communication, which is a formal, professional, and commercial requirement in an employee-employers relationship? It will have a multiple and cascading impact and should be scrapped immediately," he argued.

Cyber security expert Ritesh Bhatia concurred. "It will lead to financial profiling and financial surveillance," Bhatia said. "Someone may argue that with Aadhaar in place, privacy is already compromised but remember that the Unique Identification Authority of India and Aadhaar numbers are a government of India organization and product. That's a big solace. You can

access some information at least via right to information provisions and take a wrongdoer to court. However, social media platforms are private entities and are not governed by local or domestic laws," Bhatia explained.

Salary communication can be anything like a message on salary credit, corpus in salary account or a salary slip, he said.

An employee-employer relationship is a commercial relationship and any move to shift that to social media platforms partially or fully, will have negative personal, professional, and financial consequences, Bhatia said.

"Take the example of new WhatsApp rules. These say commercial information can be shared with Facebook, its sister organization. The last thing I would like to see is my salary slip or wage information on Facebook or other social media platforms," he said.

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