

## **Aadhaar as a hurdle: Authentication failures and Welfare delivery**

### **Why in news?**

The Supreme Court has termed as 'serious' the allegation by a petitioner that 3 crore ration cards were cancelled solely because they could not be biometrically linked with Aadhaar.

### **What is the case about?**

- A Bench led by the CJI asked the Centre to respond to allegation made in a petition by Koili Devi.
- Koili Devi's 11-year-old daughter, Santhoshi Kumari, is allegedly a victim of hunger death in Jharkhand in 2017.
- She said the family's ration card was cancelled due to non-linkage with Aadhaar.
- She has sought an independent investigation into the starvation deaths, restoration of the cancelled ration cards and compensation for the death of her daughter.

### **What are the causes for such irregularities?**

- The insistence on Aadhaar and biometric authentication had led to the cancellation of nearly 4 crore ration cards in the country according to the Union of India.
- The Union of India gives an explanation that these cancelled cards were fake ones.
- But the real reasons lies with -
  - the technological system based on iris identification, thumb prints / inefficiencies in biometric authentication and updating
  - linking of Aadhaar with bank accounts
  - non-possession of Aadhaar
  - non-functioning of the internet in rural and remote areas, etc
- Biometric authentication failures are but expected of a large scale and technology-intensive project such as the unique identification (UID) scheme.
- There are doubts about the success rates of authentication and the generation of "false negatives."
- This is more so for labourers and tribal people.

- Those engaged in manual and hard labour, for example, are susceptible to fingerprint changes over time.
- Failures in authentication have thus led to delays in the disbursement of benefits in some cases.
- Moreover, the shortcomings lead to large-scale cancellation of ration cards without notice to the family concerned.

### **How serious is the issue?**

- The government's continued emphasis on Aadhaar was unfortunate.
- The Supreme Court has notably laid down in clear terms that "no insistence on Aadhaar can be done for statutory entitlements".
- Tribals either do not have Aadhaar cards or the identification does not work in tribal and rural areas.
- The petitioner in the case emphasized that the Aadhaar exercise deprived millions of Indians living below the poverty line of food.
- It led to starvation deaths across the country.

### **What are the concerns with redressal?**

- The government highlighted the redressal mechanism within the Food Security Act as the right place to go.
- But the petitioner side noted that not a single State had appointed independent nodal officers or district grievance redressal officer under the Act.
- All the States have mechanically granted additional designations to existing officers.
- In many cases, the officers given additional designations are from the Food Supply Department, where there are apprehensions of corruption.

### **What is the way forward?**

- Inefficiencies in the Aadhaar project should not come in the way of welfare delivery.
- Right to food, which the ration card symbolised, cannot be curbed or cancelled because of lack of Aadhaar.
- Given the scale of the problem, the central and State governments should allow alternative identification.
- This would ensure that genuine beneficiaries are not denied due subsidies.
- The question of fraud can still be addressed by the use of other verification cards and by decentralised disbursement of services at the panchayat level.

**Source: The Hindu**

