Linking Aadhar with Midday Meal Scheme

Why in news?

\n\n

The government has linked the Midday Meal Scheme in schools to the Aadhar card.

\n\n

Aadhar scheme:

\n\n

\n
- The Aadhar scheme was initiated by the UPA government about seven years ago.
\n
- But it is to the credit of the current government that it saw the potential of Aadhar as an enabler of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) schemes and used it for the dispersal of subsidies.
\n

\n\n

What HRD ministry notified?

\n\n

\n
- A human resource development ministry notification asks students to sign up for Aadhar in order to continue to be eligible for the scheme.
\n
- The necessity to have the Aadhar identity has been imposed on the “cook-cum-helpers” at schools as well.
\n
- The government believes this will ensure “transparency and efficiency”.
\n

\n\n

Midday Meal Scheme:

\n\n

\n
- The Midday Meal is a scheme for all children between the age of 4 and 12 who attend **government schools** and its challenges are different from DBT schemes like delivering subsidised LPG to people below the poverty line, or even the PDS.
\n
- There are times when **hygiene** plays the devil, at other times **food adulteration.**
\n
- At times, **it is difficult to deliver nutritious food to remote areas**. Even if the food ingredients make it to these areas, kitchens to cook them in are not available within the schools.
\n
- The community kitchens mandated by the Food Security Act proved to be a non-starter.
\n
- **The government is wrong if it believes that mandatory Aadhar cards for 100 million schoolchildren would solve such problems**.
\n
- The Midday Meal Scheme has always been dogged by problems of corruption and inefficient delivery.
\n
- But these problems are in no way linked to beneficiary fraud. It's not clear how regulating access to the Midday Meal Scheme by linking it to the Aadhar cards will improve its efficiency.
\n
- In fact, such an attempt might prove counterproductive and derail a programme that has improved school enrollment, reduced drop-out rates and improved child nutrition.
\n

\n\n

What the Supreme Court said?

\n\n

\n
- In a **2014 judgment, the Supreme Court had said that the Aadhar card is not mandatory** for receiving government subsidies. The apex court reiterated the voluntary nature of the card a year later.
\n
- In the past, when criticised for linking welfare programmes to Aadhar, the government justified the mandatory use of the card on the grounds that it helps eliminate fake beneficiaries.
\n

\n\n

What is the way ahead?

\n\n

\n
- Ironing out the problems of the Midday Meal Scheme requires a clear chain of responsibility and accountability in those who operate the programme at all levels.
\n
- It also requires a debate on the nutritional content of the food. The government would do well to address these problems.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Indian Express

\n