UIDAI permits face recognition for Aadhaar authentication

NEW DELHI, JAN 15: Aadhaar will include face recognition alongside iris or fingerprint scan as a means of verifying users, helping those who face issues in biometric authentication or have worn-out fingerprints, the authority in charge of the national identity card system said today.

The face authentication will be enabled by July to help people facing difficulty in biometric authentication due to old age, hardwork or worn-out fingerprints, the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) said in a statement. The UIDAI said that face authentication would be allowed "only in fusion mode" meaning along with either fingerprint or iris or OTP to verify the details of Aadhaar holder.

Aadhaar, the 12 digit identifier, is being used for identity authentication across banks, telecom companies, public distribution system, income tax amongst others. The extent of Aadhaar usage can well be gauged from the fact that an average of 4 crore authentications are being done on a daily basis. Today's move to allow face authentication came within a week of UIDAI allowing residents to use a virtual ID to avoid sharing their unique identity numbers when accessing government and other services in a bid to protect privacy. Face authentication would not require any new reference data as photos of citizens are already on the Aadhaar database.

"This facility is going to help in inclusive authentication of those who are not able to biometrically authenticate due to their worn out fingerprints, old age or hard work conditions," a UIDAI statement said. Citing the difficulties faced by some residents in using the existing biometric verification mode, UIDAI said that face authentication offers an additional option for all residents to have "inclusive authentication".

But it emphasised that the same will be allowed "only in fusion mode" along with one more authentication factor either fingerprint, iris or OTP for successful authentication of an Aadhaar holder. The new method will also be allowed "on need basis". To facilitate the new authentication service, the Aadhaar issuing body will work with biometric device providers to integrate face modality into the registered devices. It will also line up Software Development Kits that will have the ability to capture face image, check liveness, and create digitally signed and encrypted authentication input. The agencies which use Aadhaar verification will be "required to ensure inclusive authentication, when single modality is not working for specific residents...", it said.

"Face authentication as an additional modality to be used in fusion mode along with fingerprint/iris/OTP will be available in production...by July 1, 2018," it added. As many as 119 crore biometric identifiers have been issued so far, and Aadhaar is required as an identity proof of residents by various government and non-government entities. For instance, the government has made it mandatory for verifying bank accounts and PANs to weed out black money and bring unaccounted wealth to book. The same for cellphone SIMs has been mandated to establish the identity of mobile phone users. Agencies