

## ‘Don’t deny food items for lack of Aadhaar’

Centre issues instruction to all States

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The Centre has instructed the States not to deny PDS benefits to any person who does not have Aadhaar or has not linked the ration card to the 12-digit biometric identifier, and warned them of strict action for violations. It also asked the States not to delete eligible households from the list of beneficiaries for non-possession of Aadhaar.

The instruction was issued this week to all the States, after an 11-year-old Jharkhand girl allegedly died of starvation recently after she was denied PDS ra-

tions. In the directive, the Union Food Ministry clarified that deletion from the ration card database could happen only after a proper verification of the ration card holder establishes “beyond reasonable doubt” that an entry pertaining to the said ration card holder is not genuine.

State field functionaries have been asked to ensure that beneficiaries are not turned away for non-possession of Aadhaar, and all exceptions in this regard are recorded in a separate logbook.

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When contacted, Ajay Bhushan Pandey, CEO of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), told PTI: “The aim is to ensure that no one is denied any food benefits for lack of Aadhaar, lack of linking, or technical difficulty in biometric authentication. As long as a person is genuine, he has to be given the benefit...”

The States and the Union Territories will have to provide Aadhaar enrolment facilities to those without Aadhaar and link their Aadhaar numbers with ration cards, the Food Ministry said, warning of strict

action for violation of the notification.

As per the National Food Security Act, the States have been given time till December to link Aadhaar with ration cards.

### **Deadline extended**

However, the Centre on Wednesday told the Supreme Court that the deadline for mandatory linking of Aadhaar for benefits of government schemes would be extended till March 31 next for those who do not have the biometric identification number. So far, 82% of the ration cards have been seeded with Aadhaar.