

Govt plans to ease Aadhaar-mobile linking

Centre Likely To Allow Proxy Authorisation For Senior Citizens

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New Delhi: There is relief on the way for mobile phone users, particularly senior citizens, facing difficulties in complying with the Supreme Court's order linking Aadhaar with mobiles as proxy authorisation may soon be permitted for the purpose.

The options being considered by the government in consultation with telecom companies include use of online OTP (one time password) for mobile numbers registered with the Unique Identification Authority of India, alternatives such as iris scanning for per-

sons whose fingerprints are indistinct and home visits for senior citizens.

Sources said the UIDAI is expected to issue directions outlining the options that could be made available to mobile users to comply with the SC ruling so that the process is completed with minimum inconvenience to the public. There has been concern that public annoyance over time consuming procedures was reflecting poorly on the government even though it had not sought Aadhaar linkage to phones.

The proxy authorisation option will see a person nominated by a senior citizen verify-



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ing Aadhaar linkage for the mobile user. As of now, it is not clear whether the facility will be restricted to senior citizens or be available to other mobile users as well. The move should ease problems like long waits at mobile service provider outlets and issues such as non-availability of machines.

Aadhaar linkage could get even simpler if the mobile number is the same as provi-

ded to UIDAI at the time of registration. The UIDAI itself is not permitted under law to share details with telecom companies but can do so through an OTP verified process provided by service provider. The option of home visits by telecom companies where biometrics can be confirmed by a small scanner linked to a mobile is also being considered.

Telecom secretary Aruna Sundararajan told **TOI** that the government was mindful of many concerns, and recently held a meeting with mobile operators and UIDAI to sort them out. "We are trying to smoothen things for both — telcos and customers. We are particularly concerned for older customers where biometrics can fail. We are coming out with measures to ease the pain

of customers," she said.

Mobile phone consumers have been receiving urgent and repeated messages from telecom operators to link their SIM cards with Aadhaar, or face disconnection in services. Customers of leading companies such as Airtel, Vodafone and Idea Cellular are having to deal with SMS alerts and even tele-calls to link the numbers with Aadhaar.

For example, customers are being told by some operators that their numbers will be disconnected in case the verification is "not completed immediately". This is far from the truth as customers have time till around the first week of February next year to complete the process. Then why the threat? A harried customer of Airtel got this message regarding

the linkage with Aadhaar; "... To continue services, please contact the service centre."

"It does not even mention that we have time till February next year. I am already being bombarded by the operator to do it immediately, or face disconnection. Is this fair?" the Delhi-based customer said. "Besides, there is major trouble for people living in rural, hilly or smaller towns. Telecom service centres are located at faraway locations and it may not always be feasible for customers to go again and again," said another customer.

Telecom companies justified the urgency on their part to the "potential rush if everyone comes for verification towards the end of the deadline in February". However, they did not answer questions about customer pain points.