

CASE OF NAME MISMATCH Jharkhand police report says semi-digested food found in her body proves it wasn't a starvation death; local parties 'playing politics'

Police Puts 'Starvation Death Victim' in the Dock for Fudging Aadhaar

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New Delhi: A much-reported 'starvation death' of a 64-year-old woman in Jharkhand due to "mismatch in Aadhaar systems" has turned out to be a case of a normal death due to her failing health, while revealing that she and her family had fudged her Aadhaar card to avail in her name the pension of a family member who had died over 25 years ago.

ET accessed a report sent by the Jharkhand Police to the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) after Aadhaar took a lot of flak following the death of Premani Kunwar on December 1. The woman's stepson Sunil Mahto has now been arrested by the police due to the fraud committed by him as part of a conspiracy while the deceased woman has been put in the dock in the police report.

While it has been established that a PDS dealer did not grant her wheat two days before she died because "she did not bring a bag

to carry it", the Jharkhand Police said semi-digested food was found in her body proving that this wasn't a starvation death.

The police report in fact says "politics" has been played over the death by local parties. Premani Kunwar's husband Matur Mahto died about 10 years ago, and his first wife Shanti Devi had died 25 years ago. But for years, the family had been drawing a pension of Rs 829 per month for Devi, saying she was alive while Devi's account in SBI had the thumb print and photograph of Premani Kunwar, the second wife. A life certificate was submitted yearly to prove this. Kunwar too was drawing a pension in her name under the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Vidhwa Pension Yojana of Rs 600 a month which came into another SBI account. The latter account was Aadhaar-linked since 2015.

Kunwar's stepson Sunil Mahto managed to update her Aadhaar number in the name of his mother Devi this October and linked it to Devi's account. Kunwar's pension hence start-



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ed to go into the said account. Police found CCTV footage to ascertain that Mahto withdrew Rs 30,000 from his mother's bank account on November 6 and the withdrawal slip carried Kunwar's thumb imprint and his mobile number. The police report said this showed Kunwar and Mahto were part of the conspiracy. While for years, they submitted a life certificate in person to prove Devi was still alive to get her pension, a digital life certificate was submitted this year, exposing the fraud.

"It is due to Aadhaar that such frauds are

STEPSON ARRESTED

 **Woman's stepson Sunil Mahto arrested by the police due to the fraud committed by him as part of a conspiracy**

coming to light," a senior government official said, adding that the Jharkhand police is still probing what documents were cited by Mahto to get Kunwar's Aadhaar updated in the name of Devi who had died 25 years ago.

UIDAI had also sent a two-member team to Jharkhand's Korta village. The police report, while dismissing the starvation death theory, has also mentioned that the family had three Antodaya cards eligible for 35 kg of wheat every month on each card which they had availed in September and October; while the bank account in Devi's name still had ₹3500 as balance. However, the PDS dealer who denied ration to Kunwar two days before her death has been suspended and proceedings have been initiated to cancel his licence, the police report said. Authorities have, however, denied that ration was not given to Kunwar due to an Aadhaar mismatch. "The PDS dealer took her fingerprint but denied her the ration since she didn't have a bag to carry it," the police report said.