

## UIDAI threatens to penalise Airtel

UIDAI is threatening to slap a financial penalty on Bharti Airtel for allegedly opening Airtel Payments Bank accounts of customers surreptitiously while carrying out Aadhaar verification of their mobile numbers. An Airtel spokesperson denied any wrongdoing. **P23**

# UIDAI orders probe against Bharti Airtel

## Threatens Fine For Alleged Aadhaar Act Violations

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**New Delhi:** The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has ordered an investigation against Bharti Airtel for alleged violations of the Aadhaar Act and is threatening to slap a financial penalty for opening Airtel Payments Bank accounts of customers surreptitiously while carrying out Aadhaar verification of their mobile numbers.

The probe against the company was ordered after complaints of prima facie violations were found to be valid, sources told **TOI**. "The lapses are serious in nature. Prima facie, it is a criminal breach of trust and contract, and there are violations of provisions of the Aadhaar Act," said a source, who did not wish to be identified.

The matter came to the fore when payments related to cooking gas subsidy landed into the Airtel Payments Bank account for some customers, and not in their pre-designated savings bank accounts with other banks. Most of them complained against the transfer and said that they were unaware of Airtel Payments Bank accounts, which they alleged had been opened without their authorisation or knowledge.

The subsidy amount — sent under the central government's Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme — is estimated at over Rs 40 crore. After being tipped off, UIDAI had initially served a show-cause notice to Airtel as complaints of violations against the company's ground staff were highlighted.

When contacted, UIDAI CEO Ajay Bhushan Pandey said that the authority has received complaints of wrongdoing against "certain telecom companies" during the Aadhaar verification process. "We have ordered an investigation into the matter. If the allegations are found to be true, after a thorough investigation, then they are of a very serious nature," Pandey told **TOI**, but did not identify the operator. "An inquiry is on, and we expect to take a decision on the matter soon," Pandey added.

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**Ajay Bhushan Pandey**  
| CEO, UIDAI

When contacted, an Airtel spokesperson denied any wrongdoing by the company, but added that it is working with its retail partners to strengthen processes and ensure transparency. "Airtel Payments Bank is fully compliant with all guidelines and follows a stringent customer on-boarding process. Airtel Payments Bank accounts are opened only after explicit consent from the customer. A separate consent for DBT is taken from all customers," the company said in response to a detailed questionnaire.